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WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARED AWAY IT WAS SEEN THAT GERTRUDE HAD SAVED GORDON'S LIFE WITH HER OWN.

## A CLOUDED CHRISTMAS.

(Concluded.)

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER VII.

CHRISTMAS EVE had come—Christmas Eve, ushered in by sunshine that sparkled on the icicles hanging to the trees, and made the bushes all a-glitter with innumerable diamond points that the Ice King had crowned himself with during the preceding night.

A little of the snow lingered in the deep ridges by the farm gates, but the roads were hard and crisp to the tread, and a delicate rime lay on the evergreens that the Court servants had brought in to decorate the house with—for both Roy and his sister wished to keep up the old custom of adorning their walls with the shining leaves and scarlet berries of the shrub that time has consecrated as a fit emblem of the festive season.

Vivien and Fraulein both helped to weave the wreaths of greenery—the former in a listless, half-

hearted sort of way, very different to her usual manner. The truth was, the young girl felt extremely miserable; and although she endeavoured to disguise the fact, and parried Roy's questions with a forced laugh, her efforts were not altogether successful, for it was impossible to avoid noticing the change that had come over her, and stolen from her all the bright vivacity, the gay insouciance that had formerly lent her such a charm.

Ever since her conversation with Trevor she had been pondering deeply over what he said, and whichever way she looked the prospect offered nothing but misery.

Most days she took a long walk to the wood in order to secure to herself solitude and time for thought, and once she had met Gordon with his gun and a brace of dogs at his heels, and he had walked by her side for half an hour, talking of various things, but making no allusion to the strange circumstance that had occurred on the afternoon of her visit to Gordon Chase.

And now the day had arrived when she must finally decide on her course of action, and let Trevor know the result of her week's deliberation.

In the afternoon she put on her things and went out, taking her customary path, and thinking to herself, bitterly enough, that her hours of liberty were drawing swiftly to a close; for she had fully made up her mind that she would accept Trevor's terms and save Roy and the honour of his name by the sacrifice of herself.

It was a magnificent afternoon for the time of year, the dead leaves under foot no longer sodden by rain, but crisp with frost, the air keen and exhilarating, the sky blue as sapphires, and Nature in her kindest mood for ushering in the great festival of the child-God's birth.

Vivien thought how intensely she would have enjoyed such a walk a week ago, before Trevor's words had crushed all the joy of her glad youth; and then she thought of what her future would be—linked for life to a man whom she not only did not love, but for whom even her former friendly liking had changed to contempt since he revealed himself in his true colours.

By this time she had arrived at the tower, and after a moment's hesitation, actuated it may be by a desire to look once more on the spot where she had first met Gordon, she mounted the steps, and, after ascending to the top, came half way

down again, and then stopped suddenly on hearing the sound of voices from below.

Wondering who the speaker could be, she peered cautiously over the crumbling stones down into the basement of the tower (which she could easily contrive to do, and yet keep herself unnoticed), and there she saw two men sitting on some logs of wood, and in such a position that she could not possibly make her exit without attracting their attention.

This was awkward, for they neither bore a particularly prepossessing appearance, and Vivien was perfectly aware of the loneliness of the spot, and the small chances there were of anyone passing; so thinking perhaps the men had only come inside for the purpose of eating the great lanches of bread and cheese they held in their hands, and that after having finished they would move on, she decided to wait quietly where she was until they had gone.

Her reconnoitre had given her some idea of what they were like—two tramps, rather over middle age; one with a very brown face, and a ferocious bull-dog expression, that promised little mercy to an enemy; the other somewhat younger and not quite so repellent looking. Both were attired in corduroy trousers, splashed with the mud of many a long tramp through the dirty roads.

Eating with them was apparently a serious business, for they munched on without exchanging a word until the elder and browner of the two had finished, then he wiped a thick murderous-looking clasp knife with which he had been backing off huge morsels on his knee, and restored it to his pocket.

"I wish we had summat to drink," observed the other with a sigh, "it's mighty hard on a man as has been on the road all day, when he can't get a drop o' beer with his wittles."

"It's harder when he can't get wittles or beer," returned his companion, grimly, "and that's bin the case with me pretty often of late."

"Aye, you've had rather a rough time of it since you came out of 'quod,' as for me, I've wished myself back there sometimes, for if they gives ye work to do, they gives ye enough to eat as well."

"I've never wished myself back. All the while I was there I was looking forward to this hour—this hour when I have my liberty, and shall have my revenge!"

The younger man looked at him curiously—he had spoken with a low-repressed fierceness that, taken in conjunction with the words themselves, told its own tale of the hatred born of a sense of injury, and fostered by a spirit of vengeance.

"Then ye haven't given up yer plan, Mike?" he questioned, dropping his voice.

"Given it up! no—and never shall, until I've done what I intend doing. Given it up!—when I've bin counting on it, and brooding over it for the last ten years—when it's bin the one thing I have thought of all day, and dreamed of all night! It ain't very likely I shall give it up now that I'm within reach of the man, and when this very night I shall see him drop down dead afore me, as my Rachael dropped dead afore him. You see this here?"—he pulled from under his ragged coat a pistol, and then put it back again very carefully—"well, I stole the money to buy it, and I'd sooner starve than part with it afore its done its work—the charge that's in it will be in Keith Gordon's heart before this time to-morrow! What's that?" he added, quickly, as a slight sound became faintly audible.

"Oh! nothing!—a stoat, maybe," answered his companion, carelessly. "I say, mate," he continued, in a different tone, "it's rather a ticklish job, this, you know. A man has but one neck, and when the rope's round that, everything is all up with him."

"I know, but if I had ten thousand deaths to risk for the sake of killing Gordon, I'd do it!"—with fierce emphasis.

"You must have a big score against him to hate the man like that?"

"I have—shall I tell you what it is? The tale isn't a long one, but it's one that's bin told pretty often, I expect—a gentleman falling in love with a girl he can't marry and won't leave. . . Well, you know already that years

ago I was a gipsy, and married a woman as died when her child, our little Rachael, was born. Praps it was because I cared for the mother that I grew so fond of the daughter; anyhow, Rachael and me was always together, and happy enough tramping about with the tribe, till she was grown up into the prettiest girl I ever saw. Not one of the others could touch her, and when we was on the racecourse or at the fairs, every young fellow would throw his money into her lap for the sake of her bright eyes and long curls. She had plenty to say for herself, too, was always ready with a laugh or a joke, and could hold her own anywhere. Well, nearly eleven years ago we came to this wood and camped here all the summer, and then a sort of change came over Rachael; she grew quieter and thoughtful like, and her temper got uncertain, and she seemed to like to get away by herself. I was puzzled, and asked her what the matter was, but she said 'nothing,' and wouldn't tell me; only another gipsy girl as was jealous of her came to me and said she was in the habit of meeting a gentleman every evening—a swell as came wrapped up in a large coat, and with a broad-brimmed hat to prevent his face from being seen.

"Well, I didn't say anything to her about it, for just then the camp broke up, and we moved on a good distance from here, and I thought she would get all right again. But she didn't, and as the weeks went by she drooped and drooped till she was only a shadow of what she had bin; and then, one day when I found her cryin' and sobbin' alone, I begged her to tell me what was the matter, and she did, partly. She said that last summer a gentleman had told her he loved her, and promised that in a few months' time he would send for her to be with him always, but she had never heard a word from him since she left the Etheridge Woods, now six months ago, and she was growin' despairin' of his keepin' his word, and marryin' her. 'Damn him!' I said. 'If I knew who he was I'd shoot him down like a dog. Was it Mr. Keith Gordon, Rachael?'

"And then she fell on my neck and cried pitiful, and begged me to do him no harm, while I cursed my own blindness for not seeing it all before; for you must know this Keith Gordon would often come to our tents, and was so open-handed and free-spoken that not one amongst us didn't like him. I had frequently heard him praising Rachael's beauty, and telling her she was one of the prettiest girls he had ever seen; but it never struck me to connect him with her shame till then, and I meant what I said when I told her I'd have shot him down if he had stood before me at that minute! A little while after—it was in December—Rachael suddenly disappeared, and I went in search of her at once, and came down here, because I thought this the likeliest place for her to come to. I was right, for when I got to Gordon Chase, late in the evenin' on Christmas Eve, I found my daughter dead!—shot through the heart down by that very pool I pointed out to you when we came here half an hour ago!"

He stopped abruptly, his rough voice hoarse and shaken with suppressed feeling, but a minute later, he added,—

"They held an inquest on her body, and brought in a verdict of 'Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown,' but it was proved she had gone up to Gordon Chase in the morning, and that Mr. Gordon had met her at the door, and taken her into his study, then afterwards that she had gone to the wood, and he had followed her. The gun she was murdered with was picked up close to the pool, and Mr. Gordon confessed it was his property, but in spite of all this the jury said there was not enough evidence against him to commit him for trial, and so he was let go off scot free, although I took care to let them know he had been poor Rachael's lover, and forsaken her.

"You see there is one law for the poor and another for the rich, and when I saw that it would not touch Gordon I determined to take it in my own hands, so one night I broke into the Chase with a knife in my pocket that would have soon avenged my daughter's death, only luck was agen me. The butler caught me getting in through a window, and we had a tussle, and he

got wounded. So when I was took they sentenced me to ten years, and I was carted off, while he, the murderer, was left in safety. But I swore I would kill him, though I waited twenty years, for I knew I couldn't die until her death was paid for. And here I am, and this very night he shall suffer part of what he has made me suffer."

To describe the fierce vindictiveness, the thirsty longing for vengeance betrayed by the speaker's voice, would be an utter impossibility. It made at least one of his hearers' blood run cold, and a shivering fear shoot through her veins as she listened.

"Then you intend breaking in the Chase to-night?"

"Yes, I think I can manage to get in through the study window, for it is not barred like the others are, and I can easily force it with my tools. Lucky for me he only keeps one man servant, so there's not much danger of my being caught."

"Well, mate, I shan't go with you," said his companion, after a little cogitation. "If it was a case of the family plate, or such like, I shouldn't mind, but when it comes to killing—why that's a bit too risky for me."

"As you like," was Michael Lee's indifferent response.

It did not matter to him whether he had company or not in his terrible task, and at present his mind was only capable of taking in one idea—the execution of the vengeance that nothing less than blood would satisfy.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE dusky shades of night were beginning to close in over the sombre wood before the two men took their departure, avowedly with the intention of proceeding to the ale-house, and seeing if they could by any means get something to drink. In the meantime a sudden change had come in the weather, the sky had grown overcast, and thick flakes of snow whitened the atmosphere, giving warning that a heavy storm might be expected before long.

When she felt sure the tramps had gone, Vivien, cramped and chilled through remaining so long in the same position, came slowly down the steps, her senses almost paralyzed by the strange tale she had just overheard.

Could it be true! she asked herself, a stony horror at her heart. Could Keith Gordon indeed be the double-dyed villain, the monster of iniquity this man's story would make him out, or was it all a hideous delusion—an unreal dream from which she would presently awake!

Vivien pressed her hands against her brow, and shivered as she glanced around, for there was a terrible loneliness in the sombre dusk of the wood, with those slow, soft snow-flakes silently descending, and adding something of a ghostly element to the scene; and Vivien, at all times imaginative, now had her nerves strung to their very highest tension.

She made a great endeavour to think calmly over the situation, but the only thing that presented itself with any clearness was the urgent necessity of at once warning Gordon of his danger—this much mere humanity demanded, whether he were innocent or guilty.

She would let that question rest—personally, it was nothing to her, she told herself; and the horror she felt at Lee's story was only that which would naturally arise in any woman's breast at the thought of having been brought into personal contact with one guilty of such crimes as were laid to Keith's charge.

Then Vivien made a sudden pause, and her hands fell from her face, and she staggered back as if someone had dealt her a heavy blow; for there, in the solemn silence of the wood, a knowledge came to her that almost overwhelmed her with mingled shame and terror, and brought a flood of crimson over neck and throat—the knowledge that this feeling was not an impersonal one—that this intelligence regarding Keith came straight home to her with a force that, if he had



been a stranger, she could not possibly have felt—in a word, that she loved him!

She understood now why, all unconsciously, the hero of her vague maiden dreams had gradually taken shape, and become clothed in Gordon's form—why her fancy had often recalled that bold, strong face with its half cynical, half mournful expression, and why her heart had beat with a strange, glad rapture at the remembrance that she owed her life to his courage.

But despite her youth and inexperience, and the strange tumult this discovery wrought, the one paramount consideration of Gordon's peril enabled her to collect her thoughts, and decide on immediate action.

The very circumstances of the case precluded her from warning him through a third person, so her only chance was to hurry at once to the Chase, and acquaint him with the plot she had just overheard.

Directly she had made up her mind to this she set off with fleet, noiseless footsteps across the wood, the wind blowing the snow into her face, and coughing mournfully through the boughs, as it swept over the leafless trees.

The walk was far from a pleasant one; for although it was not yet five o'clock, an early winter darkness had set in, and only the shadows of the trees, outlined here and there by the snow lying on the branches, were visible in the damp air.

Besides this, it was bitterly cold, and Vivien shivered as she drew her furs closer over her chest, and glanced around half apprehensively—the solitude, of itself, was dismal enough to frighten her, but the thought that she might possibly encounter either of the two men who had just left the tower held in it a yet greater terror.

This fear, however, proved itself groundless, and she breathed a sigh of relief as she reached the gate leading into Gordon's grounds, and ran swiftly up the ill-kept gravel walk until she came to the house; then, without allowing herself time for deliberation, she gave a sharp pull to the bell that awoke an echoing clangour from within the house. A moment later the door was opened by Gordon himself, whose face expressed the utmost astonishment as he recognised his visitor.

"I wish to speak to you on a matter of importance," Vivien said in a low voice that she vainly endeavoured to make firm; and seeing how agitated she was, Gordon led the way into his study, closed the door, and then stood near it waiting for her to speak.

But this, which Vivien had believed would be the easiest part of her task, now proved itself the most difficult, for the excitement that had hitherto helped to preserve her calmness entirely deserted her, and she was not only at a loss for words in which to commence her communication, but a hot sense of shame at the remembrance of Michael Lee's story came over her, bringing with it a very sickness of despair as the awful question of Gordon's guilt presented itself.

Keith, watching the changes in her expressive face, and observing her emotion, was naturally at a loss to account for them; but he said, kindly,—

"Has anything happened to distress you—and is it in my power to render you assistance?"

Vivien shook her head.

"It was to warn you that I came," she said, hurriedly, and with averted eyes; and then, in a few words as possible, she told him of how she had been in the tower, and heard one man informing another of his purpose of breaking into the Chase that same night.

But she said nothing of Lee's narrative; and so Gordon, who had no clue to guide him, seemed much more puzzled than alarmed.

"Then it was for my sake, not your own, you appeared so distressed?" he observed, after a few minutes' pause, and in a peculiarly low voice, fixing his eyes on her with a steadiness of expression that made her own fall. "Well, I thank you. If anything could reconcile a man to the misery of existence it would be the revelation of a woman's character such as yours—pure, brave, and true."

Vivien rose hastily—there was no further necessity for her remaining, and yet she wished to

convince herself that Gordon would take measures to assure his own safety—a consideration that did not seem to have occurred to him as yet.

"You will see that all the entrances to the Chase are well guarded to-night!" she said, timidly, pausing on her way to the door.

"Yes—except the one by which my visitor intends entering," he answered, with a laugh; "I shall stand behind that, so as to receive him as he deserves. Have you repeated to me all these men said?" he added, knitting his brows together in a puzzled frown. "Did this one give me no clue to his motive for desiring to injure me?"

Vivien grew pale, and made a half-shrinking movement of withdrawal that was not lost on her interlocutor.

"Ah! I see you have kept something back," he exclaimed, quickly. "But as you have told me so much, I beg you will let me hear the rest."

"Very well," said Vivien, with a sudden calmness, born of desperate desire that Gordon should hear the truth and have an opportunity of denying the crime imputed to him—a desire that was none the less intense because she herself could not—would not—believe him guilty. "This man who was plotting against your life gave, as his motive, the fact that you had been his daughter's lover, and after deserting her had killed her."

Gordon staggered back as if the accusation had been a heavy blow that deprived him for the moment of his senses, and there was a pause of a few seconds.

When Vivien ventured to look at him she found a deadly pallor had overspread his features, and he had put his hand across his eyes as if to shut out some dreadful spectacle that presented itself to his mental vision.

"Then it was Michael Lee," he said at last, in a low voice; "and you," turning to her eagerly, "what reliance did you place on his words?"

Vivien did not reply, and acting on a sudden impulse, Gordon came and stood in front of her, laying his two hands on her shoulders and gazing down into her deep dark eyes.

"Look at me," he said, briefly; "and then tell me whether you believe me innocent or guilty."

She obeyed, and raising her eyes met his glance fully—it seemed in that moment as if each were looking into the other's soul, and as Vivien withdrew her gaze a conviction that no power in the world could have shaken, took root within her.

"Innocent!" she exclaimed, in a voice whose glad exultation she made no effort to conceal; "I would stake my life on my belief!"

His hands dropped to his side as he turned away, and leaning on the back of a chair let his head fall on his folded arms. There was silence between them for a few minutes, then he drew himself up to his full height with a certain dignity of aspect that gave emphasis to his words.

"Your opinion is justified," he said, in shaken tones that were sufficient evidence of how deeply he was touched; "appearances I know were all against me, and the fate that kept me silent when the inquest was held still forbids me to speak openly now. Only this much I surely may be permitted to say—I was neither the lover of Rachael Lee nor the author of her death."

"But there surely cannot exist a reason strong enough to close your lips on such a momentous point!" exclaimed the girl, excitedly.

"Yes," he said, shaking his head, "such an one does exist, and I am bound to respect it in spite of everything. What it is I may not mention even to you, but of its vital importance you may easily judge, when you think of the life it has condemned me to lead for the last ten years. Great Heaven!" he exclaimed, a sudden excitement coming in his manner. "I have sometimes wondered how I could endure it—how it is that the constant strain has not driven me mad! Picture to yourself an existence such as mine—solitary, isolated, miserable—deserted alike by friends and enemies; shunned as the perpetrator of two of the vilest crimes that can disgrace humanity—a very outcast among outcasts!"

It is an utter impossibility to describe the

bitter agony of his tones, breathing, as they did, the pent-up misery of a life's despair. But it was only for a moment he allowed his feelings to master him thus; then the stern restraint that had grown to be almost a second nature reasserted itself, and brought with it a certain amount of shame for his having betrayed such a lack of self-control.

"And now, perhaps, I had better see you home," he said, awaking to the exigencies of the situation, and knowing better than Vivien how much surprise and comment her presence in his house would excite if it became noised abroad. "I will walk with you as far as the gate leading into the shrubbery of The Court."

"But will it be safe for you to do so?" demanded the girl, hesitating; "suppose this Michael Lee should be lurking about?"

The question seemed to surprise Gordon; his own safety had been his last consideration, and there was a tinge of amusement as well as sadness in his smile, while he reassured her.

"It is quite a novel sensation for me to find anyone taking an interest in my well-being," he told her, as they left the house and began walking quickly down the avenue. "I did not think there was a creature in the world—except, indeed, my servants and dogs—who cared whether I lived or died."

Vivien made no answer, and they proceeded in silence until they entered the wood. Before they had gone very far the young girl stumbled over a stone that she had not observed lying in the path and would have fallen forward had not Keith upheld her.

"You had better take my arm," he observed, offering it with a slight hesitation, and Vivien blushed hotly in the darkness as she accepted the support. She would have liked to have urged him further on the subject of taking precautions for his own safety, but a very natural reserve held her silent, and neither spoke again until they reached the gate Gordon had mentioned; there they paused, and he took both her hands in his.

"How shall I thank you for coming to me?" he said, his voice sinking almost to a whisper. "It is not only for the fact of your warning that I am grateful, but also for the knowledge you have given me that there is one pure heart in the world that has offered me its sympathy."

Vivien never forgot that moment as long as she lived. Around them was a snowy world of dimly-illuminated whiteness, above them the solemn immutable stars, shining with the same silent splendour as when, over a thousand years ago, on this very night, that other star had come up from the East, to show the Magi where the child-Christ was lying.

There was no sound to break the wintry stillness, and for all that could be seen or heard they two might have been the only living beings for miles round. Perhaps the spell of the moment and the presence of this fair young girl may have had an influence in making the blood course quicker through Keith's veins. As her hand lay in his Vivien could feel the quick throbbing of his pulses, and through her own frame there ran a swift thrill of half-frightened ecstasy such as never before had stirred it.

Cynic as the world had made him, misanthrope as he had tried to make himself, Gordon was yet young, and the hope, and the beauty, and passion of youth were not dead in his breast, although a stern fate had done its best to crush them into annihilation. Years ago he had told himself that such desires as most men cherish to have a fair wife by his side and children in his home must be for him no more than a dream, and that love—the fullest, richest, truest completion of life—could never come to him, even in the far-off future. But for that he had not cared, for he had laughed at love as a poet's fancy, a girl's imagination, an artist's idyll—anything but an influence potent enough to sway strong men.

Now he learned his error, for here on this quiet Christmas-eve he felt its subtle essence creeping like a fever through his veins, while passion whispered that to hold Vivien in his arms, to look down into her lovely lustrous eyes, and feel her heart beating against his, would to

a rapture, the like of which life could not offer him.

"Good-bye," he said, hoarsely, pressing her hands to his breast, and half turning away.

As he did so his eyes fell on a little bunch of violets she wore at her throat, and he touched them with his finger.

"Will you give me these as a memento of to-night?" he whispered, and she, not trusting herself to speak, made a quick gesture of assent.

He bent down to take the flowers, and as he did so, seized by a sudden, uncontrollable impulse, he caught her to him, and kissed her sweet red lips—wild, passionate kisses that were in themselves a declaration and farewell.

Then he turned and left her, standing there in the darkness, her cheeks burning, her heart beating, and every pulse in her body vibrating under the influence of his touch, as a harp answers to the practised fingers of a musician.

## CHAPTER IX.

ROY ETHEREDGE was sitting in his study that same night, reading over, for the twentieth time, a letter he had received by the evening post, when there came a gentle tap at the door, followed by the entrance of Vivien, who crossed the room, and took her customary seat on a low stool, close to her brother's chair.

After much deliberation, and a vain effort to escape from the meshes of the net Trevor had so subtly wound about her, the young girl had given her suitor an affirmative answer, and now came to acquaint her brother with her position. To say the news astonished him is to say little, for it had never entered his head to regard Trevor as Vivien's lover, and, in good truth, he was little inclined to welcome him as such.

"Are you sure this match will conduce to your happiness?" he asked her, looking anxiously into her downcast face the while; and Vivien, with a brave smile, answered gently that she was sure it would be for the best, so Roy had to be satisfied.

"You knew well I would never oppose your wishes in such a matter, still—I confess I would rather you had made a different choice. Trevor is pleasant, and clever, but—"

Roy did not continue, for it was not easy to put into words the intangible feelings of distrust with which Trevor inspired his most intimate friends—a distrust that had its origin in no one particular failing, but was more an instinct to be felt than a sentiment to be analysed.

"I suppose," he added, after a slight agitation. "Trevor has told you few details of his first marriage?"

Vivien shook her head; in point of fact, her lover had never even mentioned his wife's name, and she had been withheld by very natural delicacy from making any inquiries.

"Well, you know at least that he married Keith Gordon's sister—a very beautiful girl, who was deeply in love with him. I don't think their life together was a very happy one, for she was jealous, and he so frightfully extravagant that he soon got rid of her fortune, and then contracted debts which Keith Gordon himself ended by paying. Finally, Trevor and his wife went to live at the Chase, and remained there for about twelve months, at the end of which time she died, and he and Gordon have held no communication with each other since. I cannot, of course, vouch for the truth of the rumour that accused Trevor of neglecting Mrs. Etheredge—one never knows how much or how little to believe of such reports, but there was probably some amount of foundation for them, and it is only fair to you to mention them."

"We will hope they were untrue," Vivien replied; but her heart sank as she said it, for she knew there would be small chance of happiness for her in this loveless union.

However, there was no turning back now—she must go on as she had begun if she would save Roy, even though every word he had repeated had been the unexaggerated truth.

And, indeed, the risk of Trevor's possible ill-treatment seemed a very small consideration in

comparison with what she had already given up by consenting to become his wife.

"Have you made any arrangements, or fixed a date for the marriage?" asked her brother, presently.

"Yes. Trevor wishes it to take place immediately—in a fortnight's time."

"So soon! And what do you say to such haste?"

"I agree to it," she answered, feverishly; for, in effect, she was almost as anxious as Trevor to get the ceremony over. It seemed to her that once a wife the terrible strain and struggle of the last few days would be merged in a sense of irrevocability that would be far preferable to suspense.

"Very well," Roy replied, quietly, but with a bitter pang at his sister's apparent willingness to cast off the old home fetters for such a new passion as this; and then there was a short silence between the two, each being occupied with his or her own thoughts.

"I, too, have news for you," said Roy, after a little while, rousing himself from his reverie; and Vivien was struck by the joyous ring in his voice, which, however, was speedily accounted for.

It was his own love story he had to unfold, and it was short enough to be told in very little time, especially as Vivien proved such a sympathetic listener.

"I should have spoken to you of Alice before, only she did not wish our engagement known in consequence of her uncle's opposition," said the young man, in conclusion. "That is now a thing of the past, for in a letter I have just had she tells me that the cousin, whom it was arranged she should marry, has taken the initiative, and mated himself with a wife in India, and the affair has so enraged his father that he has not only threatened to disinherit him, but—what is much more to the point—has given his consent to Alice's becoming engaged to me."

"I am so glad," whispered Vivien, kissing him, "but when am I to see her?"

"As soon as possible, for I shall go over to Glasbury this week, and bring her home with me."

At that moment there came a sudden chime of sweetness borne across the snowy air from the village church, where the bells were ringing out a glad welcome to the Christmas dawn—the dawn ushered in long years ago by a yet sweeter choir of seraph voices to the wondering shepherds on the quiet Bethlehem hills.

Roy rose, and drawing his sister's arm within his own, went to the window and threw it wide open, and then they both stood listening to those sweet, solemn peals—listening silently, for many thoughts were busy in their brains the while; and each of them, while thinking of the changes the last twelve months had wrought, were wondering what others would happen ere another Christmas morning broke.

At that same moment Keith Gordon was sitting alone in his study, leaning his head wearily on his hand, and thinking of the girl by whose side he had stood in the starlight an hour or two ago.

He was thinking of how passionately he had kissed her, and the delight of those moments was still quickening his pulses, though he cursed his own madness for forgetting, even for a few seconds, the barrier that kept him apart from Vivien as surely as if a wide gulf had lain between them.

What would he not have given to be able to offer her the stainless name, whose honour he had once worn so proudly—to take her to his heart and feel that, in spite of everything, her love was his, and here at least was peace!

But it was not to be, and a bitter cry of anguish went up from the man's tortured soul as he thought of the terrible, ir retrievable past!

His reverie was presently broken by the entrance of a lady—the same Vivien had seen when she took shelter at the Chase, only even whiter and more ethereal-looking now than she had been then. She came forward, half-hesita-

tingly, and took up a position behind Keith's chair, laying her hand lightly on his shoulder.

"Why are you not in bed, Gertrude—it is too late for you to be wandering about," said Gordon sweeping on one side some violets that had been lying in front of him as he spoke.

"I cannot rest," she answered, with a half-wild, half-pitiful inflection in her voice. "Don't you recollect what anniversary this is? When I was in my room the air seemed to stifle me, and so I went outside and let the wind blow over my temples because they were throbbing so, and then I heard the bells ringing and they repeated the same thing over and over again—always the same. They have stopped now, and another Christmas-day has come in!"

"You should not have gone out," Gordon said, in rather an alarmed voice, his thoughts flying to the possibilities that existed of Michael Lee lurking about the place even thus early. "Go back to your room and try to rest."

"Rest!" she echoed, with a little mocking laugh; "you should know better than say such a word to me, Keith; when do I rest, night or day! Let me stay here with you. I will be very quiet and not speak a word to disturb you, but it would be misery for me to be alone."

It was impossible to resist such an appeal, and Gordon motioned her to a seat, thinking to himself that there was no probability of Lee's trying to effect an entrance just yet, and that in half-an-hour's time Gertrude would be calmer, and might then be induced to retire quietly.

She kept her word as far as being silent went, and seemed quite content to sit and watch him as he made certain notes in a pocket-book. The house was very quiet, with that quietude which seems peculiar to midnight—the ticking of the clock, or the fall of a cinder on the hearth were the only sounds to break the stillness.

All at once the door creaked on its hinges, and looking up quickly, Gordon saw, to his dismay, the form of Lee standing in the aperture.

Instantly he comprehended what had in truth occurred, namely, that Gertrude had left ajar the little door at the side of the house, which she always used for going into the garden, and Lee had abandoned his plan of entering through the study window when he saw such a safe and speedy mode of ingress open to him. It was for this reason, too, that he had got in so much earlier than he otherwise would have done.

As this idea flashed through Gordon's brain, he blamed his own folly for not having thought of it before and guarded against such a contingency, but regret was of no avail now—he must act, not think, and there was no time to be lost.

"What do you want?" he demanded, while Gertrude started up with a loud shriek, and then stood perfectly still, gazing in terror at this midnight intruder. "If money be your object, you have come to the wrong place, for there are neither jewels nor any other valuables here."

"And if there were I should not touch them," rejoined the gipsy, contemptuously, while he slowly withdrew his right hand from behind his back. "It's not money, and it's not jewels as can pay for the wrong you've done me, Keith Gordon," he added, in the low, hoarse voice of hardly repressed passion. "Blood will have to wash that out, and I swore ten years ago that I'd never rest satisfied until the murderer of my daughter Rachael had been shot dead by my hand—and I've come to keep my vow!"

There was something in the words that made Gordon grow pale, but he dashed forward to the other side of the table to seize a pistol he had loaded ready for any emergency that might arise. At the same moment Lee stepped farther into the room, raised his right arm, and took aim with a steady coolness that could not possibly have missed its mark. Gertrude, whose eyes had been fixed on his face, saw the movement, and comprehended its meaning.

Then, a loud report echoed through the night air, and simultaneously, a blinding flash seemed to lighten before Keith's eyes.

When the smoke cleared away, Gertrude was lying senseless on his breast, a stream of blood gushing from her side, but a brave smile of triumph on her pallid lips.

She had saved Gordon's life with her own!



## CHAPTER X.

CHRISTMAS DAY passed very quietly and uneventfully at Etheredge Court, although one at least of the party under its roof was in a state of mental excitement that she could hardly prevent from appearing in her demeanour.

Vivien's thoughts were with Keith Gordon, of whose safety she was not yet assured, and all day long she was wondering whether Michael Lee had gained an entrance the preceding night, and what would be the end of this shadow of crime and dishonour lowering over Gordon Chase.

Her own situation was miserable enough, but of this she thought little, for so entirely had Gordon come to dominate her life that all considerations were merged in the paramount one of his escape.

She dared not go to him, or even write—the remembrance of those kisses still burned on her lips, making the vivid colour fly to her cheeks, as she thought of them; and to attempt any further intercourse, would be a wrong to her own maiden modesty, as well as to Trevor, who now held an undivided right to her allegiance.

Trevor, of course, was as elated as he could possibly be at the success of his scheme; everything had gone well with him, and all the chances were still in his favour—at one bold stroke he had gained a beautiful bride, and at the same time the prospective half of a splendid inheritance—what more could any reasonable man desire?

He confessed Fortune had favoured him, and was so far grateful as to say to himself, that for the future he would turn over a new leaf, and settle down quietly as a country squire, entertaining friends, making himself popular in the neighbourhood, and playing the part of a good landlord.

Yes, it would be an ideal existence. There should be no more plots, or gambling, or horse-racing—all that should be buried in the past, and with the help of his wife he would forget it.

It hurt his vanity when Vivien drew back from his caresses, and when he felt her cheek grow cold beneath the touch of his lips; but still he did not seriously mind it; for his experience of women had taught him that they were changeable creatures, inconsistent and variable as the wind; and, he said to himself, when they were married she would grow to care for him, and all would go exactly as he wished.

Nevertheless, in order to make assurance doubly sure, he was anxious the marriage should take place with as little delay as possible; and in this desire he was aided, as we have already seen, by Vivien's indifference; so it was finally decided their wedding-day should be fixed a fortnight hence, and he then announced his intention of setting out for London on the following Thursday—Christmas fell on a Tuesday that year—in order to complete certain necessary arrangements.

To all this Vivien acquiesced without demur, but at night she excused herself rather early, and went to her own apartment—glad of the opportunity of escaping from her lover, and feeling herself free to indulge in those thoughts his presence rendered impossible.

Her first action on entering the room was to draw up the blind and gaze through the window at the snowy world of whiteness outside, on which was shining—

"That orb'd maiden, with white fire laden,  
Whom mortals call the moon."

It was shining on something else, too, besides the snow—on a little white object lying on the sill, which immediately attracted Vivien's attention. She noiselessly raised the cushion in order to draw it in, and it proved to be a letter wrapped round a piece of stone, which had evidently been used as a weight. It contained these words, written in French:—

"Thinking you may possibly wish to know the conclusion of your yesterday's adventure, I write to tell you that Michael Lee fulfilled his intention of entering my house, but instead of hurting me, was himself so badly wounded that he immediately fell, and was consequently at my mercy. I have had him conveyed to a bedroom, where his wounds have been attended to, and he is

watched over by my servant; and as he is quite incapable of moving, there is no danger of his attempting further mischief yet awhile. I have not told you the whole of the consequences attendant on last night, as there is a chance of this note falling into other hands than your own, but in due time you may hear further particulars."

This was all; it was not signed, or even addressed, and it was evident from the precautions he had taken that Gordon had been afraid of compromising her by allowing her name to be coupled with his own. Nevertheless, short and unsatisfactory as the note was, Vivien was very grateful for it, and after reading it, fell on her knees with a little sob of thankfulness for Heaven's mercy in allowing him to escape unhurt.

Two days after Trevor Etheredge set out for London, while Roy started for Glasbury, where he stayed a night, and then returned, bringing Alice Matthison back with him. Greatly to his satisfaction the two girls conceived a strong fancy for each other, and almost immediately a cordial friendship sprang up between them, which was cemented by the many sympathies they had in common.

Indeed, Vivien was very glad of Alice's society, for although Fraulein Schults was everything that was good and kind, she was too old to prove a companion of congenial tastes, and the young girl had often longed for a friend of her own age, in whom she might confide, and feel sure of being understood.

Not that she arrived at such a stage of confidence as to lay open the secrets of her heart; Vivien was too reserved in nature for that, and the name of Keith Gordon never once passed her lips in her intercourse with Alice; neither did she speak much of Trevor, who was still away in town, but on all other subjects she was candid and frank, and Alice was completely subjugated by the charms of her future sister.

And so the time went on, flying swiftly past, and bringing nearer and nearer the day that should give Vivien's life into her cousin's keeping. It is impossible to say how unspeakably she dreaded it, and how her very heart seemed torn when she thought of Keith, and all that might have been if she were free, and if that shadow of guilt had not lain between them. To do her justice, it must be said she indulged as little as possible in retrospection of any kind; and the feverish sort of gaiety she assumed in order to hide her real feelings answered its purpose well with Roy, although Alice, whose womanly keenness of vision was intensified by her affection, was not so easily deceived, and more than half suspected her unhappiness.

Delicacy naturally kept her silent on a point that she could see it was Vivien's desire to conceal, but she questioned Roy concerning his sister's languid mien, and asked him if he could explain it—of course with a barren result, for the young man himself was puzzled, and said the only thing he knew of to trouble Vivien was her lover's absence.

More than once our heroine was on the point of going to Roy and repeating all that Trevor had told her, confess the sacrifice demanded of her was too great, and then the idea of his grief and shame kept her back, and she said to herself that the thought of all she had spared him would in itself go far towards retrieving the misery she was called upon to endure.

But the struggle told on her in spite of all her efforts; she grew thin and wan, and the bright girlish laugh that used to echo so merrily through the passages was never heard now. Even Fraulein Schults noticed the change and made herself quite unhappy on account of her pet's altered appearance, telling her, with a sad shake of the head, she had better have stayed in the cloistered repose of the old Belgian convent; there at least sorrow had been unable to reach her.

At last the eve of the wedding-day arrived, and in the morning Trevor telegraphed his intention of reaching Etheredge Court in time for dinner.

Alice Matthison was very anxious to see him, for she thought she might perhaps obtain from

his manner a clue that would help to solve the mystery of his fiancée's curious depression, and it so happened that she finished her toilette operations early that evening, and descended to the drawing-room before either Roy or his sister were down.

She took an arm-chair near the fire, and was idly turning over a book of engravings when Trevor, in full evening dress, entered the room.

He looked rather puzzled as his eyes fell on Alice, for as yet he knew nothing of the relations existing between herself and Roy, and consequently was at a loss to account for her presence. Nevertheless he bowed, and advanced until he was within a few feet of her, and standing so that the light from the chandelier fell straight down on his face.

To his great surprise the young girl started from her seat with a slight scream, while the book she had been looking at dropped from her nerveless hands to the floor.

"I am afraid I have startled you," said Trevor, picking it up and restoring it to her. "I might have entered the room with more ceremony if I had known it was tenanted."

"I think I must have been dreaming," returned Alice, confusedly, but not removing her eyes from his face. "You are Mr. Trevor Etheredge?"

He bowed an assent, and seated himself opposite, slightly astonished, and even amused at the closeness of her scrutiny.

"I was not aware there were any visitors at the Court," he observed, smoothing his fair moustache with one delicate ringed hand. "Have you been staying here long, may I ask?"

"I came the Saturday after Christmas."

"That dreadfully cold snowy day? What a terrible journey you must have had."

"Yes, it was not very pleasant."

"Had you far to travel?"

"I came from Glasbury, in Wales."

Trevor started violently, and grew a little paler at Alice's answer. As a rule he was a very self-possessed man, but to hear suddenly mentioned a place that recalled such memories as Glasbury was an unpleasant surprise, for which he was certainly not prepared.

"You seem to know the place!" added the girl, who had been watching him keenly.

"Yes, I was there many years ago."

"And what do you think of it? The scenery is supposed to be very fine."

"Well, I really can't answer that question. I went there for the purpose of meeting someone on business, and as I walked straight from the station to the hotel, which is not as you are aware, five minutes' walk, I had no opportunity of seeing the village. It is very small, is it not?"

"Very. I suppose it was the 'Shakespeare' Hotel you stayed at—an old Elizabethan house, almost covered with ivy!"

"Yes; a picturesque old place. I remember thinking what a pretty picture it would make, and wondering if an artist had already sketched it. There is no other hotel at Glasbury, is there?"

"No," Alice answered aloud, and said to herself, "I don't like this man, he tells untruths, for the 'Shakespeare' was only made an hotel six months since, and yet he says he stayed there 'many years ago.' There is something very strange about him, and his nocturnal visit to the church. I can swear it was he I saw; his identity is too marked to be mistaken."

She had already mentioned to Roy how she had been locked in the sacred edifice all night after he had left her, and how she had been let out by the sexton the next morning, and had gone on to her friends, and thus concealed the escapade from her uncle.

Roy had expressed considerable uneasiness when he heard of the register having been tampered with, and advised his fiancée to tell the whole affair to the rector, and risk his anger. The abstraction of the leaf might prove to be a serious matter, and it was better to endure a scolding rather than condone a felony, he said; and Alice promised to be guided by his advice, and had forthwith written a full confession to

her uncle, all the more readily because she was beyond the reach of his indignation.

She had not time to pursue the train of puzzled thought the sight of Trevor had awoke, for Vivien came in, attired in some pale lustrous silk, with just enough violet in it to pass for mourning. She had left the choice of a dress to her maid, caring herself very little how she looked; and the girl had done her best to set off her mistress's loveliness, and had succeeded to perfection, for Vivien looked superbly beautiful in spite of the delicate ivory pallor of her complexion.

Trevor advanced, both hands outstretched, but the girl drew back coldly, with an involuntary movement of repulsion that caused a red flush to rise to her lover's brow, and was not lost on Alice. He said nothing, however, contenting himself with the reflection that this time to-morrow the haughty beauty would be his wife, and then he would have an opportunity of teaching her better manners. In the meantime he commenced a conversation with Roy regarding certain arrangements for the ceremony, but was interrupted by the entrance of a footman, who brought in a card which he presented to him.

The name inscribed on the card was that of "Keith Gordon."

"You say this is meant for me?" queried Trevor, his voice hardly as steady as usual.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Gordon is in the library waiting to speak to you."

"Then have the goodness to tell him I am engaged—and shall be all the evening."

The footman retired, but came back almost immediately.

"Mr. Gordon says he must see you, sir—that it is a matter of great importance, and he insists on an interview."

"Insist on an interview!" Confound his impertinence!" exclaimed Trevor, angrily. "He questions my right to refuse him, does he? Well, then, tell him I distinctly decline to accede to his request."

Again the man retired, while Trevor still stood on the hearthrug, twisting the card nervously in his fingers, and beating an impatient tattoo with his foot. He looked up quickly as the door was pushed suddenly open, and beheld on the threshold none other than Gordon himself.

"I must apologise for thus forcing an entry into your house," said Keith, bowing to Vivien, but addressing himself with cold politeness to Roy. "As the motive of my visit nearly concerns you, I venture to think you will forgive the intrusion."

Roy bent his head rather stiffly. He was favourably impressed by the brief, manly courtesy of Gordon's manner, but, for all that, he could not forget the dark cloud of guilt that hung about him, and he certainly was far from inclined to welcome him as a guest.

Keith, having made the apology he deemed necessary, turned to Trevor, and the look of contemptuous scorn he cast upon him was returned by the latter with one of equal hatred.

"I wish you to remember, that in spite of all that has passed between us, it was my desire to spare you a public humiliation, and for that reason I requested an interview which you refused to grant," he said, in slow and measured accents. "To-night I heard for the first time that you were to be married to Miss Etheredge in the morning, and that intelligence has induced me to take a step which no other consideration could have induced me to take."

"Indeed!" returned Etheredge, sneeringly. "I confess I fail to understand what interest you have in Miss Etheredge's welfare, or what difference your interference can possibly make in her relations with me."

"I can say this much to her, and in your presence—that she had better be in her grave than linked for life to such a scoundrel as I know you to be!" was the stern response, while the speaker's dark face flushed a deep red. "But that is not all—I am come to state actual facts, not my own opinions. Miss Etheredge"—turning to her—"is it true that you are about to marry your second cousin to-morrow?"

Vivien made a sign of assent without speaking

—she dared not meet the surprised reproach in Keith's eyes.

"Then I have no alternative but to tell the truth, and at the same time betray a secret that has survived ten years," he added, drawing a long breath, and averting his eyes from the young girl's painfully flushed face. "Trevor Etheredge, you are not at liberty to marry any woman, for your first wife is still living!"

Trevor started as if a bombshell had burst at his feet, but after a moment's startled gaze into his brother-in-law's face, he broke into an incredulous laugh.

"My wife not dead! You are mad! She was drowned ten years ago, and her body lies in the Gordon vault at Etheredge Church."

"A body that you supposed to be hers lies there—she herself is, at this moment, at Gordon Chase, and has been, ever since Christmas-eve ten years ago."

There was a few minutes' dead silence; Trevor's eyes fixed on Gordon with an expression of baffled enmity that defies description. Vivien bending eagerly forward, the colour coming and going in her cheeks, her hands clasped tightly across her knees. Roy and Alice seemed to each other like the spectators of an exciting drama.

"What guarantee do you bring as proof of this extraordinary story?" demanded Trevor at last.

"One that I do not think you will be inclined to question—the copy of a deposition made by your wife, Gertrude Etheredge, to Sir Henry Stone, and signed by witnesses in his presence. In it she gives her reasons for wishing the world to suppose her dead, and fully accounts for any mystery that may seem to envelope her actions."

"It is a lie!" cried Trevor, furiously, goaded beyond endurance at thus seeing Vivien torn from him; "a conspiracy—a vile fabrication got up by this man to prevent my marriage!"

"Sir Henry Stone is a magistrate, and a man of position—the very last in the world to lend himself to anything dishonourable," put in Roy. "If you have any doubt as to the truth of Mr. Gordon's statement, you cannot do better than go to Sir Henry and ask him either to substantiate or disprove it."

The suggestion found favour in Trevor's eyes, for, in spite of the air of veracity Gordon gave his statement, the elder man had been so firmly convinced of his wife's death, that even now he could hardly bring himself to believe the contrary.

"I will go," he said to Roy; "and as Keith Gordon declares Sir Henry has seen his sister he will, as you say, be able to give me a satisfactory answer," and so saying he went hastily from the room, while Alice, who had a feeling that in such a scene as this her presence was *de trop*, quietly followed his example, thus leaving Roy and his sister alone with the master of the Chase.

Gordon looked relieved as the door closed on the departure of Trevor and Miss Mathison, and came a few steps nearer Roy.

"Mr. Etheredge, I feel I owe you an explanation, as this *dénouement* has taken place under your roof, and I am anxious to give it you for more reasons than one. Still, the story is rather lengthy one, and may try your patience; so, first of all, I must ask you if you can spare the time to listen?"

"I will make a point of doing so," Roy responded, courteously, and motioned Gordon to a seat as he spoke. This, however, the latter declined, and while he told his story remained standing with one hand resting on the back of a chair, and in such a position that no movement on the part of the girl seated by the fire escaped his keen eyes; and Vivien could see that, though ostensibly he addressed himself to Roy, it was for her behoof the narrative was really given.

## CHAPTER XI.

"In order to make everything clear to you I must go back ten years or more," began Keith. "As you are doubtless aware, Trevor Etheredge married my only sister and went to reside in London, but in consequence of his extravagance

having placed them in such a position as to prevent their keeping up an establishment of their own, they both came to live with me at Gordon Chase.

"In the summer of that year a tribe of gipsies camped in the vicinity, and I frequently went to see them, as I was much interested in their manners and customs, and desired to study them more closely than I could have done in books. Amongst them was a beautiful girl named Rachael Lee, who had the misfortune to attract the attention of my sister's husband, and afterwards made a point of meeting him every evening, but in a secret manner, for Trevor knew his wife to be exceedingly jealous, and feared lest the story should reach her ears. In view of this, it seems he contrived to spread a rumour that I was the girl's lover, and as he took every precaution for keeping himself undiscovered, his part in the affair was not suspected.

"In time the gipsies went away, and nothing more was heard of them for some months—not until the following Christmas-eve in fact. On that morning I happened to be passing through the hall, when I caught sight of Rachael Lee at the door, but so changed from the bright young girl I had known the previous summer that I hardly recognised her. However, I took her into my study, and gave her some wine—for she was faint from exhaustion—and then she asked for my brother-in-law. I told her he was out in the wood shooting, and when I questioned her as to her changed appearance, she grew very excited, and said, loudly enough to be heard by one of the servants outside, that 'she had cause enough to curse Gordon Chase and its inmates.' After that, she told me Trevor had been her lover, and I discovered she was unaware of his marriage. When I informed her of it she was furious at first, and vowed she would be avenged on him for having broken faith with her. It would be easy enough, she said, for her father had declared he would shoot the man who had brought her to misery; and she, fearful of his doing injury to Trevor, of whom it was easy to see, she was passionately fond even yet—had allowed him to suppose I had been her wooer.

"She was, however, resolved to have an interview with Trevor, and left the Chase for that purpose. Directly after her departure I remembered that Gertrude had also gone to the wood to meet her husband, and fearful of the consequences if the two women fell in with each other, I hurried there myself. On my way I contrived somehow to sprain my foot, and through this accident had to go back home. I entered the Chase by a side door, unobserved by anyone, and then proceeded to bind my ankle with some bandages I had in my study, and after this decided it would be useless to make any attempt to find Rachael now, as she might be far away in the intricacies of the wood; and, besides, if she had not met Trevor or Gertrude already, there was no danger of her doing so, as they must be on their way home to luncheon.

"A little while afterwards, the whole house was in a state of terror and commotion, caused by the news that a murder had been committed down by the pool, and half-an-hour later the body of poor Rachael Lee was brought to the Chase, shot through the heart.

"In the confusion that ensued, the absence of my sister was unnoticed until evening came; and then, on inquiring for her, I learned she had not been seen since she had set out in the morning, avowedly with the intention of joining her husband. I went immediately to Trevor and asked if he had seen her, but he replied in the negative; and on my suggesting the necessity of a search being instituted, replied I could do as I liked—he was ill, and not able to leave his room, he said.

"Of course I despatched servants, and also went in quest of her myself, aiding my hurt foot with a stick, and before we had been out long one of the men came to tell me he had found Mrs. Trevor Etheredge's hat caught on some willows by the side of the river. Naturally enough the idea that she had fallen in the water and been drowned was quick to suggest itself, and I sent the men off to get drags, and have the river



searched, while I walked along the banks on the look-out.

"Presently I came to a little cavern and I had discovered when we were children, and the secret of which we had kept most religiously. It was one whose existence was not likely to be suspected, for the entrance to it was covered with brambles, which we always had to move when we wished to get inside.

"It struck me these bushes looked as if they had been moved, so I climbed down the bank, and entered the cavern, and then I found my surmise had been correct, for there was Gertrude crouching up in one corner, pale and trembling, and hardly able to speak through fright and exhaustion.

"She rushed into my arms with a cry of thankfulness that became hysterical, and her manner altogether was so wild that I myself grew frightened, and begged her to lose no time in telling me what had happened. Little by little, I drew the truth from her, and then I found her fear was no chimera of imagination—there was, alas! too terrible a foundation for it.

"It appeared she had been in the wood in the morning looking for her husband; and had at length come in sight of the pool, where she saw him, with his one arm thrown around a gipsy girl, to whom he was talking very earnestly and tenderly.

"First of all, the girl was upbraiding, but his soothing arguments and caresses speedily had an effect on her, and finally she threw herself into his arms, and embraced him with passionate fervour.

"After that, Gertrude—who had hidden herself behind the trunk of a tree—heard Trevor say he must go to the gamekeeper's cottage, as he had an appointment with him on a matter of some importance, but that if she would stay there he would rejoin her before long, and to this Rachael agreed.

"I believe I mentioned that Gertrude was extremely jealous as well as passionate, and you will readily understand her angry resentment when she found she had a rival in her husband's affections. No sooner had Trevor disappeared from sight than she left her concealment, and, confronting the gipsy girl, told her who she was.

"My sister's own account of this part of the affair was wild and disconnected in the extreme, as she was suffering from terrible excitement during its narration, and I dared not question her too closely, for indeed, as it was, her brain only just retained its equilibrium.

"However, there is no doubt she must have said something that wounded the gipsy's pride, for the girl turned round on her, and taunted her with the fact that Trevor loved her, and looked on his wife merely as an encumbrance he could not get rid of.

"Then it seems Gertrude's passion passed beyond her control, and she snatched up Trevor's gun—which he had left resting against a tree until his return, and levelled it at the girl who with a loud shriek, fell down dead.

"The sight of her victim caused Gertrude to realise fully what she had done, and to think of the awful position in which she was placed. She fled from the spot in terror, hardly knowing where she was going, until she found herself on the bank of the river, and close to the cavern, and then came the idea of making that a temporary hiding-place, and she at once clambered down; but before she entered, a sudden gust of wind took off her hat, and blew it out of her reach.

"As soon as I heard the story, I, of course, saw at once the consequences that must inevitably follow my sister's rash act, and it took me some time to collect my thoughts sufficiently to decide on what course of action to pursue.

"Gertrude piteously implored me to save her—either to get her out of the country, or to let her remain where she was in hiding. Above all things to keep the knowledge of her crime from her husband, and this I promised to do.

"After some consideration I decided to leave her in the cavern until it got later, and then, when the coast was clear, to take her to the Chase, and contrive to get her inside without being seen. I was induced to resolve on this

course by the fact of one part of the house having acquired the reputation of being haunted, and being shunned by the servants on that account.

"My plan succeeded admirably, and Gertrude's entrance was effected that same night, unknown to any of the household. The river was dragged for her body, and although it was not discovered, the belief that she had been drowned gained credence, and was finally accepted as a fact by everyone—her husband included.

"Then came the inquest on Rachael Lee, and, to my horror, I found myself placed in a position of the gravest peril and difficulty, from which I had no means of extricating myself without betraying Gertrude, and handing her over to a felon's death.

"Of course my mouth was sealed for her sake, and I dared not say anything to implicate Trevor, as such an admission would probably have led to my sister's discovery; so I was forced to a silence that was accepted by all as an evidence of guilt.

"Unhappily Trevor had taken out my gun instead of his own that morning, and in order, I suppose, to conceal the fact of his having had an interview with Rachael, he denied that the weapon found lying near her had been used by him; so, as it had my name engraved on it, it made the case look darker against me. Then a servant gave evidence that Rachael Lee had come to the Chase, and been taken by me into my study, where she remained some time, and where she was overheard declaring 'she had cause enough to curse Gordon Chase and its inmates.'

"It was also proved that when she left I soon followed her, but as no one had seen me re-enter the house, it was an open question at what time I did so—whether before or after the murder had been committed, and that, of course, was not in my favour.

"Trevor was able to swear he had not been on the spot, for at the moment of the tragedy he was in the gamekeeper's cottage, and they had both heard the report of a gun, and a piercing scream which had caused them to hasten to the pool, where they found the murdered girl.

"To make matters worse, Michael Lee appeared upon the scene, and accused me of being his daughter's lover, and Trevor, like the cur he is, allowed the accusation to stand; however, as all the evidence was purely circumstantial, I was allowed to go free, and the jury returned a verdict of 'murder against persons unknown.'

"But in spite of this semi-acquittal the stigma remained, and I went forth with the brand of Cain on my brow. All my friends believed me guilty—even the nearest and dearest—and abandoned me to fight my battle single-handed against the world."

He stopped a moment to glance at the quiet figure by the fire, but her head was bent, and the firelight flashed on the stony radiance of the diamonds adorning the hands she had put up to hide her face,—the diamonds scintillated so unsteadily that he knew how her fingers must be trembling.

"Did I say all had deserted me?" he went on almost immediately. "No, there were two who believed in my innocence, and stuck to me through everything—a gardener and his wife, both of whom I had known from my childhood; so when the rest of the servants left the Chase they stayed on; and after a while I deemed it well to take them into my confidence with regard to Gertrude's presence in the house, although not even to them did I hint at her guilt."

"For the first week or two after the murder I had been afraid her brain would give way, for her terror of being apprehended even seemed to increase. After awhile, however, she grew calmer and more like herself, and would wander about the rooms in the haunted wing, although she very seldom ventured into the inhabited portion of the house—not because there was any danger of discovery, for no visitors ever trespassed on my hospitality. To increase the certainty of her death, I had dropped a scarf she had worn farther down the river, and some weeks afterwards a body was picked up which was supposed to be hers, and was interred in our family vault under her name, so no doubt whatever existed as to her fate.

"And so the days went on, and the quiet

monotony of my life had one good result, in bringing a certain amount of assurance to Gertrude that she need have no fear of being discovered, for she never ran the slightest risk except once," his eyes again sought Vivien's, "and then I knew I could rely on the honour of the person who had seen her."

"Last Christmas-eve an event happened that brought matters to a climax; Michael Lee forced an entrance into the Chase, with the object of taking my life, and fired a pistol as I was sitting in my study with Gertrude, who threw herself on my breast, and received the shot intended for me.

"Since then she has been lying in a very precarious state, and last night, believing herself to be dying, and having learnt from my old housekeeper that the stain of her crime rested on me, she despatched the woman secretly for Sir Henry Stone—who was once an intimate friend of our family—and to him she made a full confession of everything, thus exonerating me."

"At the best of times I hear very little of what goes on in the outside world, and of late I have been so constantly with Gertrude that I have heard nothing at all; but to-day I was informed by the doctor attending my sister, that Trevor Etheredge was to marry his cousin in the morning, and so I lost no time in coming to inform you of Gertrude's existence; and that that impediment will stand in the way long," he added, sorrowfully. "She has hated many days longer than we ventured to hope, but there is no doubt her few remaining sands of life are ebbing very fast."

"Then he ceased speaking, and there was a silence—a silence broken by Roy coming forward and grasping Gordon's hand.

"If anything can repay you for all you have suffered, it will be the consciousness that you have acted as one of the noblest men that ever were created," he exclaimed, his voice husky with emotion. "Vivien, what do you say?"

Ah! what could she say? What words were there strong enough to tell him what she thought of him—this noblest heart with its silent heroism of endurance; this grand life that had been one long self-sacrifice, that had calmly given up everything—friends, fame, and honour—and had seen its best years drift by, heavily laden with the weight of another's guilt?

She could not speak, she could not think, she only knew her faith had justified itself, and that this was her hero—nobler far than any knight who sat at Arthur's table, braver than the bravest who had ever shivered lance defending innocence in the old days of chivalry. Oh, how she loved him, and how she gloried in her love, all unworthy as she told herself she was.

She forgot the presence of Roy—perhaps it would have been just the same if she had remembered it, for the unity of her feelings carried everything before it—and she came and knelt at Gordon's feet, beautiful in her new-born humility as she raised her love-lit, tear-misted eyes to his face.

"Oh, brave heart . . ." she said, and she took his hand and pressed her lips upon it.

Gordon bent down to raise her, and as he held her to his breast there was somewhat the same sort of look in his eyes as a man in the desert, dying of thirst, may have when the first drop of a cup of clear water touches his burning throat. Roy, seeing that look, understood it, and left them.

## CHAPTER XII, AND LAST.

TREVOR ETHEREDGE came back from the Barrow's house with slow footsteps and a gloomy brow, for Sir Henry Stone had authenticated all Gordon had said, and Trevor saw his hope of calling Vivien "wife" must now be, at best, only an indefinite one.

To describe his rage and disappointment at thus having his plot baffled is impossible, and both were intensified a little while later, when, on entering the drawing room, he found Gordon still there, and seated by the side of Vivien.

"Excuse me," he said, pausing at the door in

indecision, and biting his lip, "I will come in later on—when Mr. Gordon has gone."

"You had better wait now; a few minutes will be quite sufficient to conclude all relations between us," said Roy, coldly. "It is only fair to you to state that Mr. Gordon has revealed your share in the fate of Rachael Lee, as well as the perjury you committed at the inquest; and after that, it is hardly necessary to remind you that neither gentlemen nor honest men will permit your society, and that in future our paths must lie as wide apart as possible!"

"What!" cried Trevor, casting a glance of malignant hatred across at Keith, "are you prepared to receive whatever calumnies this man, my enemy, may think fit to utter against me?"

"There is no other alternative but to believe his words when they are attested by circumstances, and the breath of a dying woman. You will scarcely venture to deny that you were Rachael Lee's lover in the face of your wife's evidence, as given by her in a deposition of which the copy is now in my hands."

"And you, Vivien," said Trevor, raising his eyes from the ground, and looking at her fixedly; "what have you to say to the man who was to have stood by your side at the altar?"

Vivien paused a moment, and shivered before she answered,—

"I can only echo my brother's words."

"So!" he exclaimed, with a bitter laugh, "you desert me, too? Well, before I go, will you grant me a few minutes' private conversation?"

"No," said Roy, without giving her time to reply. "She is under my guardianship, and I forbid her to hold any communication whatever with you."

"I ask you again, will you let me speak to you alone?" reiterated Trevor, taking no notice of the young man's interruption. "I think," he added, meaningly, "when you bear in mind a statement I made to you a week ago you will accede to my request."

Vivien rose, after a slight hesitation, and laying her hand on Roy's shoulder, said,—

"Let me go; it is something of importance, and it is better I should hear it at once."

She led the way into the library, Trevor following and closing the door as he entered.

"It would be useless to deny that Gertrude still lives, after having heard from Sir Henry Stone that he has seen her," he commenced, coming at once to the point, and letting his moody eyes rest on the girl's flushed loveliness in a gaze of half-sullen admiration, "but I also hear that she cannot possibly linger more than a day or two, and I wish to obtain your word that you will keep yourself free, and at the end of twelve months ratify your former promise, and become my wife."

The young girl recoiled in horror at the cold-blooded heartlessness of this proposal. Cruel as she knew Trevor to be, she hardly thought him capable of making it.

"I will conclude no such bargain," she exclaimed, in indignant anger. "I wonder you dare suggest so abominable a contract, much less imagine I should consent to it. If this is all you wished to say to me I may as well retire."

"To your lover?" said Etheredge, with a bitter sneer, for he had been jealously mindful of the intimacy that seemed to exist between Keith and Vivien. "Gordon's eyes made no secret of their admiration, and from your own manner I should judge you would not prove so cold to him as you have been to me."

The angry crimson rushed to Vivien's face, and her lips curled scornfully, but she made no reply as she took a step forward towards the door—only one step, however, for her further progress was barred by Trevor.

"Stay," he said, "it is useless for you to attempt to leave until we have come to a clear understanding regarding our mutual position. If you will think for a moment you will see the absurdity of supposing I shall allow myself to be turned out of the Court by your brother's orders, unless I receive a distinct undertaking from you to marry me when I am free to claim you. That undertaking I ask you to give me now."

"And I decline."

"Have you counted the cost of a refusal?"

"I care not what it may be"—defiantly. "I have too much self-respect to be drawn into a promise to marry a man whose wife is still living."

"In that case I shall be forced to carry out my threat," said Trevor, his voice trembling with the passion into which her firmness threw him. "And recollect, after the first step is taken it will be too late to draw back."

"And what may that, first step be, pray?" inquired a voice at the door; and Roy, anxious on Vivien's account, entered the room and faced his cousin. "Is it permissible to inquire the meaning of this threatening tone I find you adopting to my sister?"

"Have a care lest I adopt one yet more threatening to you!" was the angry response, uttered in a voice that evinced the difficulty with which the speaker kept down his rising passion. "I advise you not to try me too much with your insolence, otherwise you may possibly find yourself in a particularly unpleasant dilemma."

Roy laughed contemptuously.

"That sort of thing won't do with me, whatever effect you may think it would have on a girl. Recollect, too, I am master here, and cannot be insulted with impunity in my own house."

"Your own house! Well, it certainly makes a difference to the position a man can take up when he speaks under a roof he claims as his; but he should, first of all, make sure his claim is a lawful one."

"Come away, Roy—please come away," pleaded Vivien, seeing that Trevor's anger had mastered him, and a quarrel between the two men was imminent; but Roy pushed her gently to one side, his blood was up too, for nothing could exceed the insolence of his cousin's manner.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, sharply; "if words like these are only the outcome of your impotent rage at being unmasked, I advise you to keep a better guard over your tongue, otherwise I shall forget you have been my guest, and show you the door."

"Indeed," said Trevor, a white wrath in his face; "I think the probabilities are in favour of the order you have mentioned being reversed, for if it comes to the point, I can prove myself the lawful heir, not you."

Vivien sunk down in a chair and covered her face with her hands, feeling that now nothing was possible to avert the catastrophe she had tried so hard to prevent, and at the same moment Alice and Gordon, brought thither by the sound of raised voices, came and stood in the doorway. Neither Roy nor Trevor noticed them—both were in the highest degree excited.

"Yes," added the latter, flinging all prudent considerations to the winds in his desire to show his triumph; "this imposture has been going on quite long enough, and I now warn you, Roy—Etheredge, as you have been falsely called—that I intend advancing my just claim to the estates as heir-at-law to your father who was never married, and whose children have therefore no right to the name they have hitherto borne."

"Liar!" shouted Roy, and he sprang furiously forward with uplifted arm that was, however, seized by Gordon, who interposed his own muscular proportions between the two men.

"Calm yourself," he said to Roy, without relaxing his hold; "a blow is useless in disproving such a slander as this; besides, it is not worth while distressing yourself on the statement of a man whose veracity is so impeachable as that of your opponent. If he repeats his assertion publicly, you have but to produce your parents' marriage certificate, and there is an end of the matter."

Roy's face fell.

"He knows it is lost," he said, moodily.

"Then search for the original entry in the register."

"Such a search would be fruitless—the entry is not in existence," exclaimed Trevor, his eyes flashing as he thought of the security of his position, and with a movement that was perfectly involuntary, his hands went up for a second to the left breast-pocket of his coat. Only Alice Matthison observed the movement, but to her it meant a great deal.

She was a quick-witted girl, and the *exposé* that had just taken place had helped her to a true estimate of Trevor's character; moreover, the scene at present enacting recalled to her mind that memorable night in Glasbury church, and, like an inspiration, part of the truth flashed upon her.

"Stay," she interposed, coming forward, and raising her hand so as to compel their attention, "I may have something to say in this matter. Perhaps, Mr. Etheredge, the reason you are so sure your cousin could not find the original entry is because it is either destroyed, or in your possession."

Her audience were electrified, for she was naturally the very last person any of them would have expected to see interfere, and Trevor's astonishment kept him silent when he heard the accusation uttered in her clear, high-pitched voice.

Finding no one spoke she turned to Roy. "You remember my telling you of how I got locked in Glasbury church one night, and saw a man abstract a page from the register? Well, I can swear to the identity of that man—it is he!"—pointing to Trevor.

If a look could have killed her she would have fallen dead at his feet, but she was brave, and she met his glance unflinchingly. "This happened on the 10th of last December," she continued, in a tone of quiet assurance, "but perhaps Mr. Etheredge can give a satisfactory explanation of his nocturnal visit, and say why he placed himself in a position that was, to say the least, compromising."

"I owe no one here such an explanation, and I decline to give it," he said, gnashing his teeth together in all the rage of baffled villainy, "and I will leave this house, and instruct my solicitor to take proceedings that will soon result in my return as its master."

"Wait a moment," interposed Gordon, who instantly comprehended the situation. "I think, on the information of this young lady, we should be fully justified in insisting on your apprehension, and I, as a magistrate, am quite ready to sign a warrant."

"It seems to me a search should be made, too, for I believe Mr. Etheredge has not destroyed the paper he took away from Glasbury, but that it is actually on his person at the present moment," said Alice, daringly; and Roy instantly declared himself ready to act on the suggestion, and rang the bell to order a dog-cart to be at once despatched for a constable.

"You shall answer for this!" exclaimed Trevor, maddened at thus seeing the fabric he had raised so carefully falling about his head like a house of cards, and threatening at the same time to engulf him in its ruins; "I insist on being allowed to leave this room, and it will be on the peril of an indictment for conspiracy that you will prevent me."

"I am willing to undertake the responsibility," put in Keith, who was sitting at the writing-table, and had just finished signing a document. "There," he continued, rising, "I think that will smooth away all obstacles so far as we are concerned."

He had no difficulty now in understanding Vivien's motive for having consented to a marriage with a man whom, he was already aware, she inwardly despised, and this knowledge may have had something to do with the active part he was taking in this scene.

Before very long a constable arrived, and then Trevor saw that no resource could possibly avail him, for Alice had been partially right in her surmise, and though—out of consideration for his own safety—he had destroyed the leaf out from the register, he had kept the certificate itself, as well as the late Squire's will, in view of his marriage with Vivien, and they were both in the little leather case in his inner pocket. So fearful had he been of their falling into other hands that he had never let them go for a moment out of his own possession.

One more effort he made—a last and desperate one. As the constable came in he took the book from his pocket and threw it into the very heart of the fire burning in the grate, then he turned



round and tried to prevent Gordon from getting near enough to rescue it.

But his ruse was ineffectual—with one swing of his mighty arm Keith flung him aside, while Roy rushed forward, and, taking up a small pair of tongs, drew the burning book from the flames. Its contents were safe, although the book itself was considerably mutilated, and some of the papers scorched.

In addition to the will and certificate there was also the letter which had such an effect in convincing Vivian of the hopelessness of attempting to contradict Trevor's assertion, and this Roy was now able to explain.

It was the writer had been Squire Etheredge himself, but the boy referred to had nothing to do with his own children—he was the son of his late brother, who had contracted an illegal marriage with a French woman shortly before he died. The good-natured plan of letting him have the Melton estate was frustrated by the lad's own death, which occurred within a month or two after the date of the letter.

Little more remains to be told, except that, from motives that will be readily understood, Roy refrained from prosecuting his cousin, and Trevor returned to the East, there to meditate on the uncertainty of the best-matured human plans, and to console himself as best he could on his own failure.

He was a philosopher, and doubtless contrived to do it.

His wife died almost directly after the events just narrated took place; and Keith, as he bent over poor Gertrude's lifeless body, and saw the placid smile her pale features wore, confessed to himself it was for the best her tired spirit had fled so soon—perhaps in the quiet rest of the grave she would find that peace denied her here; for Heaven's mercy is great, and surely her crime was atoned for by the bitter tears of anguish with which she had tried to wash it away.

Some twelve months later a double wedding took place, and while Roy bore Alice to Etheredge Court as his mistress, Gordon's gloomy house was brightened by Vivian's fair young presence, and he, looking down with unutterable love into her sweet eyes, confessed to himself that all the misery of the past years was amply compensated for by the joy of this happy present.

THE END.

Frost bells are tolled in some districts of France when frost is threatened. Immediately the inhabitants place quantities of tar between the rows of vines. The tar is lighted and volumes of dense smoke arise, thus protecting the vines.

ONE of the oldest pieces of wrought iron known to be in existence is the sickle blade that was found by Belzoni under the base of the Sphinx. Another ancient piece of iron is the wrought bar of Damascus steel which King Porus presented to Alexander the Great. This bar, which is of unknown antiquity, is still carefully preserved in the National Turkish Museum at Constantinople.

PHYSICIANS tell us that most people die prematurely through needless exposure to injuries, such as infection, improper food, excessive drinking, impure air, dirt of various kinds, exposure, accidents, unhealthy occupations, improper clothing, and so on. The three stages in the journey of life are, first, growth, from one to twenty-five; second, maturity, from twenty-six to fifty; third, decline, from fifty-one to seventy-five. A large majority of the race are constructed to live from seventy to eighty years. Most men in the second stage of life eat too much if they can afford it. The best time for marriage is not less than ten years before the summit of life's journey, which in men is about forty, in women thirty-five. At forty and after great attention should be paid to maintaining the same body weight, any great increase or decrease being dangerous. Exercise and diet can do this to some extent, for exercise till a man perspires decreases weight; if only till he is warmed, it increases it.

## CHRYSANTHEMUMS.

He lured me from the firelit room  
Adown the garden path, to see  
The white chrysanthemums in bloom  
Beneath the cherry tree.  
And while the autumn twilight fell  
In tender shadow at our feet,  
He told me that he loved me well,  
In accents silver sweet.

I heeded not the faded leaves;  
I never heard the wailing wind  
Which mourned amid the silent eaves  
For summer left behind.  
The golden hours might all depart;  
I knew not that the day had flown;  
My sunshine lay within the heart  
That beat so near my own.

Now, spring has come with flower and bird;  
And softly o'er the garden walls,  
By warm south breezes flushed and stirred,  
The perfumed blossom falls.  
New buds are on the hedge-side spray;  
New grasses fringe the country lane;  
But never in the old sweet way  
Shall we two stand again.

My mother clasps my lifeless hand,  
And tells me that the roses blow,  
While all about the happy land  
Drifts fragrant hawthorn snow.  
But looking from my lonely room  
Adown the path, I only see  
Some white chrysanthemums in bloom  
Beneath a cherry tree!

E. MATHERSON.

## LEILA VANE'S BURDEN.

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### CHAPTER VII.

MRS. BERNADINE's belief in the value of her boy's eloquence was amply justified by the success which attended his latest efforts.

Mrs. Sylvester and Margot had arrived in a short ten minutes after Leila had received Sir Julian, and here again there came an absolutely new sensation for the young man. He was actually and definitely conscious of a feeling of irritation and regret as the sound of the voices on the stairs announced the arrival of his friends!

It was a curious experience to Julian Bernadine that sense of irritation, but it was a passing one also; and, as Mrs. Sylvester and her daughter entered, he was himself again, and greeted them easily with his usual cordial agreeable manner.

"I am here, as my mother's messenger," he said, as he clasped both their hands in turn.

"No explanation is necessary as to why you have come," cried Mrs. Sylvester, "it is sufficient for us that you are here. I hope you know that you are heartily welcome whenever you choose to come!"

There was no doubt about the sincerity and the warmth in Mrs. Sylvester's voice as she made this pretty speech; she had, in fact, very quickly learnt to estimate Sir Julian at his real value, and to esteem and like him accordingly.

She was a woman of sharp intuition, practical to a fault, and the least impulsive or impressionable nature possible, therefore her good opinion was, as a rule, well founded and well deserved.

Margot welcomed the young man with a bright smile and a little deepening of colour; it was very evident she was as pleased to see him as her mother was.

Leila lost her own troubled, unhappy thoughts for awhile; she was conscious of an eager interest, of a new feeling, that was pleasure mixed with some anxiety.

The glow on Margot's cheek, the lingering smile, and the shy tender look in the pretty

eyes conveyed to Leila an added suggestion to the thought that had dawned in her mind the first time she had seen Julian Bernadine and had connected him as a possible future with her dear, loving Margot.

She gave two or three eager glances at his face as he stood talking to Mrs. Sylvester. She was trying to read him, to sound his worth, to grasp his character through his voice, his eyes and his expression; and as Leila looked on his bronzed grave face, as she listened to the tone of his strong, yet musical voice, as she saw a flitting expression of tenderness pass over his eyes as he spoke his mother's name, she was conscious of a sense of relief.

It was merely an impression, of course, and Leila had had too much bitter experience and knowledge of the world to let an impression carry absolute conviction. Still she felt glad and relieved, too, as her swift scrutiny of Julian left her with such a favourable impression.

Margot came quickly over to her friend to make her inquiries.

Had Leila taken her tonic? had she kept her promise and refrained from doing any work? had she had some tea? had she rested thoroughly? in short, what had she done during Margot's absence?

To all these questions Leila made answer with a faint little laugh.

"My usual catechism," she said, looking across at Mrs. Sylvester, and meeting Sir Julian's interested eyes en route. He thought he had never heard anything sweeter than the sound of her voice, or sadder than the music of that faint little laugh. He had a thrill of pain in his heart as it echoed in his ears, somehow it brought back the sorrowful past of his youth, it recalled the days when his mother's laughter had been as rare and as weary as this young creature's, it must be, he thought quickly to himself, the sort of likeness that he drew between his mother's blighted youth and this girl's sorrowful life that attracted him to her so quickly, and steadily.

"My usual catechism," Leila said. "What do you think would happen if I gave a wrong answer, Mrs. Sylvester, to every one of these questions?"

Mrs. Sylvester threw up her hands with a gesture of mock dismay.

"The problem is too difficult for my poor brain to solve," she said with her cheery good-natured laugh. "I imagine I should have to send off for a straight waistcoat and have my Margot conveyed to the nearest lunatic asylum without an hour's delay!"

"Mother dear!" Margot was laughing too, and then she grew very serious. "You know very well," she said apostrophising Leila, who sat with her hand clinging to her friend's, "you know I only ask these questions for your own good, and you know, moreover, that you are quite incapable of taking the very least care of yourself! Answer me, miss," with a little shake, "is it not the truth that thy servant speaketh?"

Leila's eyes had a glimmer of amusement at the depths of their violet seriousness.

"Verily it is the truth that thy slave heareth," she answered, meekly.

Her real youth, her girlhood seemed to peep out for an instant in this interchange of affectionate nonsense. Julian Bernadine's interest and sympathy deepened as he listened and looked. It was like the sudden gleam of brilliant sunshine breaking from behind a heavy grey cloud to see that merry expression hovering over her lips, making the whole of her face light up, and her eyes grow beautiful.

"But Leila, darling, joking apart, have you been good, really good," Margot inquired.

"I have tried to be good. I fear I have not succeeded very well," Leila smiled back, then, with a touch of rare colour in her pale cheeks, she changed the conversation. She had a great dislike to talking about herself at all times and especially before any stranger. The entrance of the servants with the tea equipage made a little diversion. Margot and Leila fell into a gossip over a book they had been reading, a book of the moment, and Sir Julian stood on the hearthrug

tall, brown and stalwart, talking politics and other things with his hostess.

"Miss Cecily seemed to think you would be starting for Rome in a day or two," he remarked after awhile.

Mrs. Sylvester smiled to herself, she understood her daughter Cecily thoroughly.

"We did think of going to Italy—but our plans are changed."

Sir Julian did not speak again immediately, he was looking across at the two girls, at Margot's bright head crowned with its ruddy gold hair, at Leila's slender pale face, with its big, lustrous violet stars, and its sweet, red lips. He seemed to know without any words that it was Leila's presence in the house that had caused Mrs. Sylvester's change of plans. He was instantly occupied with a new thought, a sudden idea that vaguely grew into a sudden desire.

"Miss Vane is staying with you. Do you think she would care to come to us for Easter also? My mother would be delighted if she would honour us."

"It would do her all the good in the world," Mrs. Sylvester answered in her brisk, cheery way, "she has been shockingly ill, nothing but overwork and overanxiety, poor child! She is looking a giantess of strength to what she was a few days ago, so I leave you to imagine how distressed we have been about her. A little fresh country air and a little cheerful society and amusement, is just what Leila wants. She is only a child as years count, but she has had the burden of a woman's life on her shoulders ever since she was able to think clearly. You shall ask her yourself, Sir Julian; but I cannot answer for her, she is a strange, proud girl, and is fretting I know at her long visit to us."

"She is anxious to get back to her father!" Julian Bernadine asked the question hurriedly. He was watching her face almost eagerly now; it was easier to look at her when she was not looking.

The gaze of her eyes was so steady, so sorrowful, yet so cold, it seemed to make his interest in her intrusive and unwelcome.

"Her father!" Mrs. Sylvester made a clatter with her teacup to cover her sudden rush of hot anger and bitterness, "her father! Yes, Leila would go back to her father to-morrow, to night, this very moment, only unluckily or rather luckily, I should say, considering all things, her father is not handy for her to reach. Please don't let me talk about Eustace Vane, I get into such a passion I make myself ill for the rest of the day!"

Julian did not smile, his heart was too full of pity for the delicate deserted girl opposite.

"Will you give Miss Vane my mother's invitation? Of course she will receive a written one from Wilton Crosbie as soon as I return, but perhaps—"

"We will ask her now," Mrs. Sylvester said briskly. She turned in her chair. "Leila, my dear, you will be equal to a journey into the country next week will you not? Sir Julian and Mrs. Bernadine are so anxious for you to accompany us to Wilton Crosbie."

Margot gave a little exclamation of delight, and sent a bright glance to Julian; but Leila only looked deeply for an instant, and then grew paler than before.

"It is very kind of you, Sir Julian, and of Mrs. Bernadine. I appreciate your thought exceedingly, and I am only sorry I am unable to accept your invitation, I should be delighted to do so if it were possible," she spoke hurriedly, and a little coldly, and she rose as she spoke and moved across to Mrs. Sylvester. "You know I have arranged to go back to Mountroyal-street, dear," she said, her tone quite gentle now. "Mrs. Newton expects me!"

Mrs. Sylvester took one of the girl's slender hands into her own big warm capable ones.

"I know nothing of the sort, you little trifler! I only know that we are not going to lose sight of you just yet awhile. No more Mountroyal-street for you until you have a little more flesh on your bones, and a little more colour in your cheeks. As soon as you are well you shall be as independent as you like; but for

another month at least, you must resign yourself to be coddled and worried, and taken care of whether you like it or not. Your mother's child must belong to me for just a little while longer, Leila dear."

Leila bent her beautiful little head and pressed her quivering lips to the two hands that were holding her so closely.

She made no immediate answer, for her heart was too full. It was so sweet, and yet so exquisitely sad to her to have this gentle thought and care. She, who had such need of it in her hard young life who yearned for it, but who had never had it save from strangers.

She was moved to meet coldness and trouble, but love and tenderness seemed to rob her of her strength. She conquered herself with a great effort.

"How utterly selfish I am," she thought passionately to herself.

This thought was born as she looked up and met Margot's eager wistful eyes.

Surely such love, such tenderness, such goodness as she had received (about most of it was allied to so much suffering to her proud heart) should be met with some small sacrifice! Was there anything on earth Madeleine Sylvester would not do for her? Why, then, should she let her burden of misery and trouble destroy her sense of gratitude of equal love and generosity! Something new in the expression of Margot's eyes at this moment touched Leila to the heart. There was a wistfulness and a mixture of eagerness and of dawning disappointment, a look which seemed to say to her,—

"I want to go as he asks; but I could not go and leave you. Will you not come and share my happiness, as I have shared your sorrow so often!"

It was the outcome of her own little dream about Margot and Julian Bernadine, this thought that rose in her mind, but it was enough for Leila.

With strongest courage she put on one side her own feelings, her shrinking pain at the mere idea of going among strangers, her yearning desire to be back in her old independence, back at her work, back to take up her old burden that her father's latest act had increased so terribly! All this she whispered to herself must be abandoned for at least a little while longer.

It was such a small thing to do for Margot. Could not her gratitude for her girl-friend's love and devotion carry her through so small a thing as this?

She bent her head a second time and kissed Mrs. Sylvester's hands.

"Your word is law—my mother's child obeys you, and since Mrs. Bernadine is kind enough to invite me, I shall be delighted to spend a few days at Wilton Crosbie," she said as lightly as she could.

Mrs. Sylvester laughed her hearty laugh, not that she was not deeply touched by the girl's words and manner (for no one, perhaps, knew Leila's nature better than she did, and no one could realise the sacrifice that such submission was to such a nature more thoroughly than she could do), but because she wished to smooth over an awkward moment.

"Ha!" she cried triumphantly, "I always like obedience that is voluntary. Sir Julian you see before you the most autocratic little individual in the world! Pray do not let this pretty scene of submission suggest to you that Miss Vane is either docile or obedient, she is only very very wise, she knows she has her master in me. One has to be thankful for some things, and when it comes to dealing with the Leilas of this world, one can but congratulate oneself on the fact that one is strong and big, and weighty. If I desire to drop myself upon Miss Vane—do you suppose there would be any vitality left in her crushed remains?"

In the general laugh that followed, Leila regained her usual composure. Sir Julian chatted on gaily for a few moments, and then took his leave. He found himself for one instant alone beside Leila as he was about to depart, holding her slender hand in his.

"I am so delighted you will honour us for a few days, Miss Vane," he said easily, and yet he

himself was conscious that there was more, much more than the ordinary conventional touch of pleasure in his voice and manner. "My mother will write you a few lines to-morrow. I am not returning to-night, but shall go back in the morning early, this will be an revoir, not good-bye."

Leila drew her hand away gently.

"You are very kind," she said, but it seemed to him that her tone, her bearing, her beauty was suddenly colder than before.

To clasp Margot's hand was like touching some keenly sympathetic thing after touching an icicle. Yet such is the crookedness of life that Julian's thoughts passed over Margot, and her brilliant vigorous beauty altogether as he went out of the house and clung only to the remembrance of that pale proud cold girl with her deep violet eyes, her sweet red lips and her icy manner.

His anxiety about Giles Bernadine had grown less pronounced during his visit to the big house in Belgrave-square, but as he drove back again to the lawyer's office his thoughts went once more to the unhappy boy whose cause he meant to champion by every means in his power, and whose only real tangible friend in this hour of darkness seemed to be himself.

He found he could accomplish very little in his later interview with the lawyers. Julian's greatest desire was to see Giles Bernadine, reconciled to his father, and re-instated in his former honourable position.

By very speedy action on his part he had managed to prevent the boy's resignation from being accepted immediately by the military authorities.

"My cousin will clear himself, I know it, I feel it," he had said confidentially, in an interview he had had with young Bernadine's late Colonel. "In common justice to a boy beginning life, let me entreat you to use every influence you possess in holding over the resignation till I have investigated the matter. I am sure, sir, if you speak out frankly, you do not believe Giles capable of so petty a dishonour as theft, for cheating at cards is no more or less than ordinary thieving!"

The Colonel, a kindly man, assented to this warmly.

"I have always liked Bernadine," he said. "He has always seemed to me a nice straightforward boy, incapable, as you say, of a mean or dishonourable act. He had the makings of an excellent soldier, and I assure you this scandal has caused me as much pain as though the boy had been my own. I am an old personal friend of his father's, and for that alone I should have felt a grief in this matter, had not the boy endeared himself to me on his own part. Rest assured, Sir Julian, you have my co-operation in all you may do to get Giles out of this scrape. I believe with you the boy is utterly innocent. I wish I could have the power to shoot the blackguards and well-bred scoundrels who have made him their scapegoat in this business, and I wish to heaven I had only known that the lad was drifting into such bad hands, I should soon have him to the right about. Poor chap! the older man added, feelingly, "he is paying the penalty of being young and innocent. By Heaven, Sir Julian, I am a merciful man, and a just one too, I hope; but I confess, when I think of a poor lad being ruined by the gang of unprincipled blackguards among whom he fell, whose one theory is never to walk straight if it is possible to go crookedly, I feel as murderous as a decent-minded man can feel! Get Giles out of this scrape, and I shall be the first to welcome him back to the regiment!"

Encouraged by this warmth from his unhappy cousin's superior officer, Sir Julian had gone to work with fresh energy and determination.

"Tell Giles I believe in him, I mean to get him through this," he said over and over again. He had said that in the beginning, and he said it all along.

His visit to the lawyers this day was more for the purpose of stopping the boy from emigrating to another country than for anything else.

"Tell him he must wait another week or so, he owes that to us as well as himself. Surely, Priests, he will not be such a fool as to let himself be utterly ruined without exposing those who



have ruined him. Can't you make him give up the names of all the men who were at that card party the night he was dishonoured. I have never got at the bottom of the story yet. I know he was accused of cheating by a young man whom he had never seen before, and that the story of his cheating was made public property almost immediately, but I have never known the details of the occurrence. It is vital to us to have the names published of all those present on that occasion."

"I have got one or two, but not from him, his lips seemed sealed, poor boy, he has some scruple in his head of loyalty to those he called his friends. It is no use trying to make him speak, Sir Julian, I shall have to get my information elsewhere, and I shall get it I don't fear. As you say, the details of this particular card party have never been thoroughly explained. Giles Bernadine has borne the entire brunt of the dishonour. The man who accused him was undoubtedly robbed; but that Giles robbed him I will never believe. Some of the scoundrels must have scented danger and made use of him to screen themselves. It would be an easy matter for one of them to push the marked cards into Giles' pocket, together with the notes the other man missed."

"And yet he will not disclose the names of his companions!" Sir Julian said, thoroughly interested, vexed.

"Because he believes in their integrity, just as we believe in his. If he is inclined to doubt any one it is in his accuser, whom he had never met before that night. The party was given at his own quarters, you see, and he feels himself in honour bound not to disclose the names of his guests. The man who has been so instrumental in ruining him was brought to his rooms by another man. More than that Giles will not say."

"Mistaken loyalty, indeed, when his life's honour and his father's happiness are at stake! Never mind, Priestly, we must get these names. Everything depends on that; and clear my cousin, I will, no matter what it may cost."

These were Julian Bernadine's parting words as he shook hands with the lawyer, and went off to dine at his club.

How little he imagined as he uttered them the literal and actual value that was to be attached to them!

## CHAPTER VIII.

To say that Cicely Sylvester was annoyed when she learnt that not only had Sir Julian gone personally to entreat her mother and sister to come to Orosbio, that he had been successful in his efforts, and that they were to arrive again in the course of a few days; but beyond and above this they were about to bring with them the girl she was teaching herself to thoroughly dislike, would be to express Cicely's feelings too mildly.

She was dismayed, angered, and bitterly disappointed, for it was impossible, even for her colossal vanity, not to realise that Julian Bernadine had no desire whatever to separate himself from the attractions and the companionship of other girls and devote his pleasure and his admiration solely to her.

She knew she had not been making any very great headway with this most tiresome of young men, but she had at least been able to congratulate herself on the fact that she had the field more, or less, to herself; that there were no really dangerous rivals to work against her; and that, given time, patience, and opportunity she must surely have success at last.

Now, at one blow, all these pleasant facts and with them all her hopes had vanished.

Cicely hated to acknowledge such a thing to herself, but she could not shut her eyes to the fact that Margot was a distinctly dangerous rival.

There were, in truth, some people (an amazing matter to Cicely's mind) who absolutely found Margot's brilliant colouring more attractive than her own exquisite blonde delicacy, and who were quite frank in their expression that of the two

Sylvester girls Margot was far and away the prettiest.

Cicely would have been bitterly inclined towards her sister on account of this, had not Margot herself with absolute sincerity given her sister such unlimited admiration, and from the very beginning of their girlhood, had placed herself second to Cicely, an act which Cicely accepted complacently as being only discriminating and proper. She was thus prevented from regarding Margot as a natural enemy although she could not be blind to her sister's charms much as she would have liked to have been; but there was no earthly reason for her to feel any gentle or kind thoughts for Leila Vane especially since she had made the discovery that Julian Bernadine had been quickly interested in Margot's great friend.

She smiled faintly when she heard from Mrs. Bernadine the news of her family's arrival and of Leila's approaching visit.

"How like Margot!" she said to herself, "really she goes too far, foisting this stupid Vane girl on all our friends. If I had only known that Leila was anything with them I should have done something to prevent this. Naturally, Sir Julian was bound to ask her to come when he found her a fixture in Belgrave-square—for all her pauper pride it seems Miss Leila is quick to see which side her bread is buttered," a spiteful thought which Cicely made no effort to control, "she makes good use of her opportunities! Margot may prate as much as she likes about her dear Leila's pride, I shall have a word to say on that subject in future!"

In fact Cicely was thoroughly upset. She could hardly dissemble her feelings sufficiently to let Mrs. Bernadine imagine the prospect of her mother and sister returning was other than a pleasure to her, but she managed to pass the matter over pretty well. To discuss the coming of Leila as pleasantly was not quite so easy.

She laughed slightly as she spoke of Margot's infatuation for Miss Vane.

"Please be prepared to be quite bored, dear Mrs. Bernadine, by Margot and her friend. I assure you my dear little sister is absolutely infatuated about Leila Vane. I fancy the infatuation is all on her side too. Leila accepts all Margot's adoration as a matter of course."

Mrs. Bernadine was conscious of a jarring note, but she attributed it to a wrong cause, she imagined that Cicely's tone of vexation arose from a very natural element of jealousy over her sister's attachment to this friend.

"Miss Margot is so warm-hearted, but she is also loyal," she said, gently. "I think whomsoever she may love, her mother and her sister always come first!"

Cicely laughed again.

"Oh! wait and see. Margot never gives a thought to anyone when she has Leila Vane with her, and honestly I assure you, dear Mrs. Bernadine, I cannot find the great attraction. I know Leila is clever of course, but she is so cold—so wrapped up in herself, so—" but here Sir Julian had entered, and Cicely had very quickly changed the drift of her conversation.

When they were alone Mrs. Bernadine looked across at her son.

"I don't fancy Cicely is too pleased that Miss Vane is coming. I am afraid, poor child, she is a little jealous of Margot's great friendship for Miss Vane. She seems a little hurt, Julian, as though Miss Vane were robbing her of her sister's love."

Sir Julian was glancing at a newspaper; he looked up quickly then dropped his eyes again.

"I don't think there is any need for Miss Cicely to make herself unhappy about such a thing, mother," he said, dryly, "from the little I know of Miss Vane, I should say she was quite incapable of acting so wrongly as to come between the affection of two sisters."

"Nevertheless, Cicely spoke with considerable bitterness on the subject," Mrs. Bernadine made answer, with some irritation called up suddenly in her voice and thoughts.

Sir Julian was about to make an answer, but he checked himself.

"Doubtless," was what was hovering on his

lips, "doubtless Cicely would speak with bitterness of anyone so beautiful as this Miss Vane."

But he checked the utterance of this.

He was at all times eager to prevent his mother conjuring up an imaginary future for him with any and every girl he might admire, but he had never been so eager to prevent this in any former case, as he was now.

It gave him a sense of hurt to imagine the hot pride that would course through Leila's veins if such a suggestion were to come to her.

He was guilty of deceiving (if such a harsh word could be applied to his thought) his mother for the first time.

Usually he spoke out his feelings fearlessly, he declared his admiration and his liking without any check; but then he had never felt towards any woman he had as yet met, in the way he was feeling towards Leila Vane and complex, vague, mysterious as these strange new-born sensations were, he desired to keep them utterly to himself not even to sort them out, or to arrive at any kind of understanding with himself, at least not yet.

"I am sorry to hear this, mother," was his spoken answer, "for I am sure it would make Miss Margot extremely unhappy to realise any such thing. She is such a bright good true heart and she is so overflowing with the milk of human kindness that I believe she would be most miserable if she could imagine her friendship for a girl whose life is one of toil and shadow could cause pain to her only sister."

"Oh! I dare say I am mistaken!" Mrs. Bernadine said half carelessly; but her handsome eyes had gone over to her son in a searching sort of way and her carelessness was only assumed.

Was it intuition or presentiment that came to her in that moment and whispered to her that the heart of her boy, her child, brother, friend, and protector in all, was no longer wholly and entirely her's?

She had absolutely nothing to work upon, and she was not usually given to presentiments; but certain it was that, as she looked across the room and rested her eyes on Julian's handsome head, a pang went through her mother's heart, and a touch of desolation crept after the pang.

She had been playing at this thing for so long, she had been unceasing in her efforts to get Julian a wife, she had made a sort of happiness out of the chaotic dreams that had floated in her mind about her boy's future, his wife, his home, his children!

She had drawn pretty pictures of herself holding Julian's children to her heart; but it had all been distant, unreal, visionary; despite every effort she made, despite the innumerable pretty, even beautiful women he had met, Julian had never been changed one iota.

He had laughed at her dreams, and had put them on one side.

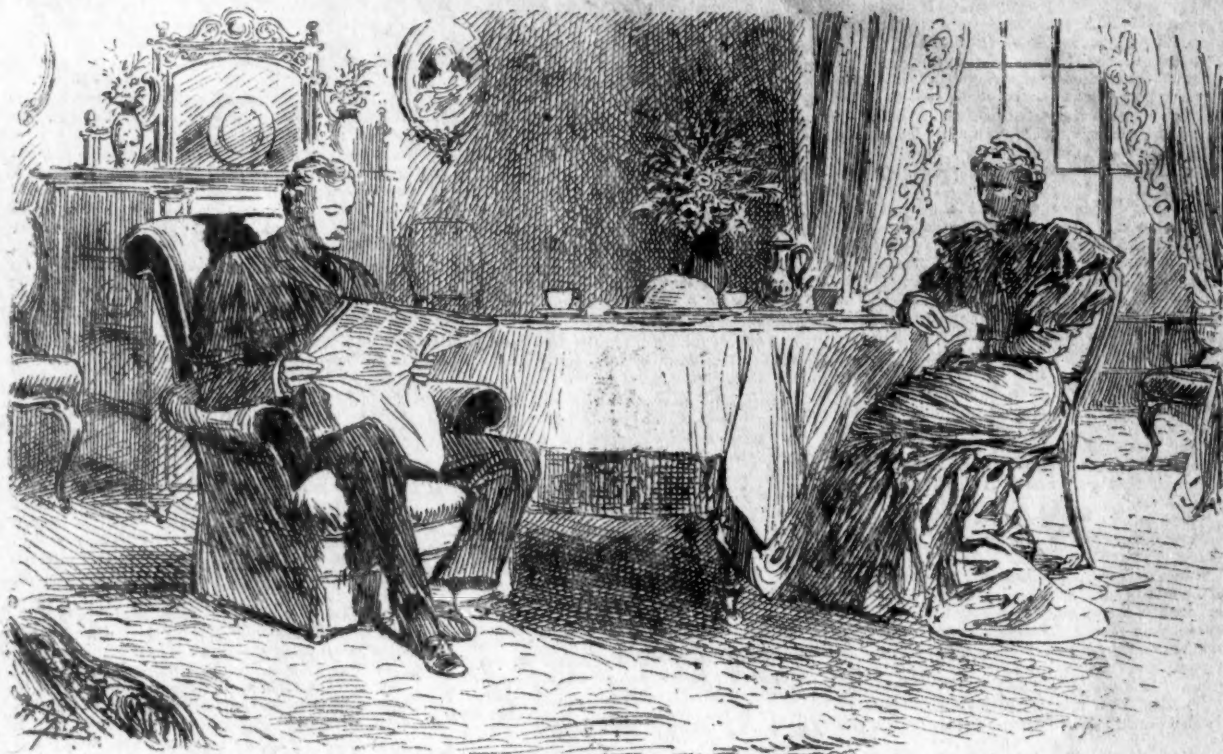
Admiration he had given freely to many and many a pretty face, but the admiration had never grown into any other or deeper feeling, his allegiance to her life beautiful mother had been untouched, unchanged, she was his all, his ideal, his embodiment of all that was womanly and necessary to his life.

Why was it that a chill feeling of conviction passed swiftly through the mother's heart whispering that her reign was about to end, her supremacy to be questioned perhaps displaced. Whence arose this feeling?

What outward difference was there in her boy's manner? What little stone could she find on which to build up a fabrication so destructive to her heart and happiness?

Mrs. Bernadine could answer none of these questions satisfactorily. She could only say she knew her intuition was right, and that some fresh, some strange some powerful influence had crept suddenly into her boy's heart—to alienate him from his old love, to put him far away from her it might be for altogether, for ever.

The mother was incapable of realising the full import of this discovery all at once, it must come to her by degrees, she was only conscious of a sense of hurt, of possible loss that was inimitable, and after this of a strong, burning jealousy that was none the less vigorous because it was so pre-eminently unreasonable.



JULIAN SAT READING, UTTERLY UNAWARE OF HIS MOTHER'S SCRUTINY.

Women of Mrs. Bernadine's nature however are rarely reasonable, otherwise the fact of her sudden born jealousy now against an unknown girl, and on account of an event which she only imagined was about to happen, and which she had worked to bring about for many a year past must have struck her as being exceedingly unreasonable.

Sir Julian, however, had so surrounded his mother with tender love and care ever since he had discovered such care and love were necessary to her that Mrs. Bernadine had never had occasion to rely much upon her own reasoning powers, and when everything in connection with the unusually strong attachment between mother and son is taken into consideration, there must be made some allowance for her feelings in the mental crisis that was coming to her so surely.

Julian was utterly unaware of his mother's scrutiny, as she spoke carelessly dismissing the subject apparently without another thought, he was conscious of a sense of relief that the matter had passed in this way, for he was by no means prepared to enter into a discussion on the subject of Leila until he had arrived at some good solution of his own feelings where she was concerned.

He was above everything else delighted that the girl was coming to Wilton Croasie.

"She will creep into my mother's heart and she will be enriched with one more true friend. Poor child! What a struggle it was with her to make herself submissive and to promise to come here. I do not know all that her life must mean but I can sympathise with her for all that. Ah! independence is sweet even when sorrow is heaviest."

He sat musing in this strain for some moments while his mother was seemingly busy with her letters. Her eyes burning with her new born jealousy, pain and hatred combined, were devouring his quiet face while he rested back in the chair.

The realisation of a separation from Julian's intimate thought was almost incredible to his

mother, she had never troubled to imagine till now that he must of course have had many things in his mind that he did not discuss with her, the bond between them had been so close, so sweet, she had never realised how close and how sweet till now, when it seemed to her as though this invisible influence were dividing it for ever.

Something of Cicely's spite crept into Mrs. Bernadine's nature in this moment.

She was not sure and she could not be sure till Leila had arrived, that she was the influence that was stealing her boy away; but she, nevertheless suddenly assured herself that she knew she should dislike this Miss Vane, and that she regretted most bitterly that Julian should have invited her to accompany the Sylvester. Thus, while Julian was sitting weaving pleasant dreams of giving further pleasure and sympathy to Leila Vane through his pretty and gentle mother, that same mother was building up a strong antipathy to Leila, and encouraging a feeling that conveyed little of either friendship, sympathy or gentleness.

Julian began chatting to his mother after awhile, he told her once again the latest news about Giles Bernadine.

"I wish we could persuade him to come down and stay with us, mother," he said, regretfully, "but the lad is obstinate. Until his name is cleared he will show his face nowhere, and if he can never disentangle himself from this mesh of dishonour, then he will go away from England and be lost to his family and his friends for ever."

"Poor boy!"

Mrs. Bernadine spoke abstractedly; her mind was running on the discovery she had made.

Julian caught the different sound in his mother's voice. He rose and went across to where she sat.

"Are you well to-day, darling?" he asked, tenderly, brushing her soft luxuriant hair as though she had been a child, "you sound a little tired I think."

Mrs. Bernadine rested her head against his

broad shoulder. It was so long since she had known the biting pain of mental trouble, that she suddenly realised she was both tired and ill.

"You must take care of yourself, my little mother," Julian went on gently.

She roused herself.

"Julian, which day did you tell me Mrs. Sylvester had fixed to come?"

"The day after to-morrow, dearest; that will suit you, will it not?"

"Oh! perfectly."

Mrs. Bernadine stared straight before her as he kissed her softly and went away.

"In another two days I shall see and I shall know if it is she who has stolen my boy's heart from me," she said to herself.

Poor foolish mother! trying to stem the tide of nature's river. Instead of harbouring these burning bitter feelings she might have given grateful thanks for the blessing of having such a son; for the years of care and love he had given her. She might have offered up many heartfelt prayers for his happiness, and have prepared to meet the woman she imagined had won his heart with sweetest, truest joy and affection.

Instead of this, she was ranging herself as an enemy against a poor desolate child whose life should have drawn out her woman's pity, not have awakened the jealousy and hatred that now filled her breast!

(To be continued.)

The Chinese burglar takes an ingredient of his own, burns it, and blows the smoke through the keyhole of the bedroom where the master of the house is asleep. The fumes dull the senses of the victim just enough to make him helpless, while at the same time permitting him to see and hear everything that goes on in the room. The only antidote against this charm is pure water, and most of the wealthy Chinese folk sleep with a basin of this near their heads.





SOON FOXDALE CASTLE ROSE UP AHEAD OF MARGERY—MASSIVE, TURRETED, SILENT AS THE GRAVE.

## DR. DURHAM'S DAUGHTER.

—30:—

## CHAPTER V.

MARGERY DURHAM sat herself down on the crazy old seat encircling the crooked blighted pear-tree, forgetting wholly now her errand thither, and clasping her hands thoughtfully in her lap.

After all, she mused, what had she found out? Nothing. She was absolutely no wiser now than she had been but a little while before.

She could only hope fervently that she had appeared neither inquisitive nor ridiculous in the eyes of Mr. Lynne.

But, no!

He could not have been annoyed or offended in any way at all, or he never would have said to her what he did—promising, too, his confidence later on.

Well, she would have forfeited gladly half-a-dozen years of her life, nay, more even, she thought recklessly, could she have only bared then and there for a moment the heart of Yolande Kildare, or looked into the past of Lyulph Lynne.

Rain had fallen during the morning—a long, steady, cooling shower which the parched earth had drunk in gratefully; but towards noon the clouds parted; and then once more the blue land of heaven showed itself faintly far above the vanishing rain-mists, and the world was glad and beautiful again; but now with drenched flowers and moist green boughs, and with that refreshing sweet earth-smell heavy on the air which comes of summer showers.

It was just the afternoon for a walk; and so, luncheon over, Margery Durham was about to set out for Foxdale Castle, to pay the visit to Lord Beaumanoir's sister, which Lady Anne Guest was still expecting of her.

"Will you not accompany me, Aunt Susan?" she inquired dutifully of that lady, before putting

on her things. "The afternoon, as you see, has turned out lovely."

"No, Margery dear," Aunt Susan answered; "I cannot do so very well. I don't much care about the Castle, at any time, as you know. Once or twice a year there is quite enough for me. Besides, I have several little jobs to attend to in the house; and Mr. Price, I expect, will be calling at four o'clock or so to see and consult me about the Blanket Club."

And so Margery set off alone on her walk to the Castle. In the road, by the corner of the churchyard wall, she met Mr. Lynne, just returning from a visit to some village patient.

Already was Lyulph Lynne warmly liked among the poorer folk in Foxdale. And already had Dr. Durham owned that the stranger was a capital right-hand.

"I envy you your walk, Miss Durham," he said, pleasantly, stopping. "The rain has made everything so delightful out of doors, has it not?"

"Yes, indeed; but I am not going far," she told him—"only across the fields and meadows here to Foxdale Castle."

"To Foxdale Castle?" he repeated thoughtfully. "Do you know, Miss Durham, that is a place which I should very much like to see—the interior of it, I mean. Is the house ever shown, I wonder?"

"Is the Castle a show-place, do you mean?" Margery exclaimed, looking up surprised into the strong young face, with its beautiful serious eyes and its vague, baffling likeness. "Oh no, indeed no, Mr. Lynne—never! Revelstoke Hall itself is always open to people for two days in the week, and the housekeeper takes them round and tells them about everything. But then you know Sir George Stoke is such a good-natured young man, and is so seldom at home himself. But not Foxdale Castle! Lord Beaumanoir and Lady Anne live there very quietly, and see scarcely anyone except my father. Of course, sometimes—"

"The Earl of Beaumanoir, I believe, has not

always lived so quiet and secluded a life!" Lyulph Lynne put in coldly.

Margery looked up at him again, astonished at the sudden hardness in his voice.

"At least—at least, I have heard something of the kind," he hastened to add before Margery could speak herself.

"That may be so; I cannot say," said she gently then. "However, he is a different and a penitent man now, my father says, and a very lonely one. His follies and misfortunes—"

For the second time Lyulph Lynne interrupted her in this matter of which he could know positively nothing.

"His sins," he said bitterly, "as the sins of others like him, have found him out—that is all. I do not call that either penitence or repenting. Verily in the end they have their reward."

"You are very harsh in your judgments, Mr. Lynne," said Margery gravely.

"Am I? I think not. I have a hard way, perhaps, of looking at certain things; but that is scarcely to be wondered at. If you only knew the whole history of my life," he said sadly, the shadow of a smile nevertheless just flickering in his eyes as he spoke, "you also, Miss Durham, I fancy, would say that it was not to be wondered at. But I am hindering you, lingering and talking here; so a pleasant walk to you."

He raised his hat and they parted—he going homeward, and Margery continuing her way towards the Castle.

"I knew it—I felt sure of it!" she said to herself, as she turned down to the meadow-path and left the roadway behind her. "I knew that a mystery existed somewhere, apart even from Yolande Kildare." And she mused as she went for the next quarter of a mile or so. "Oh, what, I wonder, can it be?" Margery cried aloud then; for there were only the cows and the starlings to hear her, and the hedge birds flying low over the short and glistening grass.

The hay was all carried days ago.

Margery reached the shield-crowned gates of Foxdale Castle exactly as the little Dutch time-

piece in the lodge-woman's parlour was striking three o'clock.

She passed unquestioned into the steep and shady avenue—for Dr. Durham and his daughter were familiar visitors to the gate-keeper—there to encounter, before she had gone many yards in that leafy solitude, Mrs. Kildare, of the Grange House, who had evidently been calling at the Castle, and who was now on her way back.

Mrs. Kildare was fashionably attired, as her habit was, and at a distance might well have been mistaken for an elder sister of her own daughter.

Like Yolande herself, she was very fair; though, with twice the number of Yolande's years, the mother's once flower-like face had now become faded and insipid.

She would doubtless have looked a very great deal better, and more attractive in every way, if she had only dressed elegantly and more in keeping with her age, and discarded the foolish affectation of youth which, in the judgment of right-thinking people, rendered her manner at once insufferable and ridiculous.

"Ah, Margery Durham, dear!" cried she effusively, holding out a neatly-gloved, lemon-coloured hand. "How are you, and how is your good father?" Not waiting, however, for any reply on Margery's part, Mrs. Kildare babbled glibly on:

"I presume you are going to call on that dreadful old Lady Anne! The old rake of a brother is not visible to-day—is somewhat worse than usual, she tells me. A frozen old horror; the sister, is not she? But there, I won't abuse her, for she gave me some lunch; and I was half dead with fatigue! I have just come away, Margery dear, and heaven be praised, say I that the duty is done. She is whalebone itself—vinegar and whalebone!" said Mrs. Kildare, shrugging her narrow shoulders, and rolling up her faded eyes.

"Is she?" said Margery calmly, yet knowing full well the dignified air which Lady Anne Guest assumed unconsciously always in the presence of certain people whom she instinctively mistrusted and disliked. "Where is Yolande to-day, Mrs. Kildare; why is she not with you?"

"Yolande, *ma chérie*!" repeated Mrs. Kildare, with another shrug, "how can I tell! She is really the most unfilial child, Margery, and that is the simple truth,"—speaking pettishly now. "Her conduct towards me becomes more trying every day, and her wilfulness at times is unendurable! This morning, for instance, she coolly ordered the pony-carriage without consulting my wishes on the subject at all and has gone driving off alone into Slingsford, somewhere, and for goodness only knows what—I don't. Yet she was perfectly aware that I also wanted the ponies to-day, having several important calls to pay—and that is Yolande all over! Selfishness is not the word for it! But there"—turning outward plaintively the palms of her small lemon-gloved hands—"je m'accommode de tout!"

Mrs. Kildare was given to favouring her talk as it were, with scraps of idiomatic French, more or less correct. Having lived and travelled so much abroad, the trick was natural to her, Margery supposed.

"Well, good-bye, Mrs. Kildare," she said, preparing to move on, knowing of old the kind of life that mother and daughter led together at the Grange House, and having but scant sympathy with them in their daily bickerings and disputes. For it seemed so wicked a thing to Margery Durham, who had no mother, that one of God's sweetest and holiest lies should be held in such light regard. "I must not stop—"

"One moment, Margery dear," Mrs. Kildare said then hastily, "what a hurry you are in to be sure, to get to that old fossil of yours, and when I have not seen you for such an age, too! I was about to remark, dear, how strange a thing it is that Mr. Lylph Lynne, an—an—an old friend of ours, should have turned up here in Foxdale, and in Dr. Durham's surgery, too, of all places in creation, when we were thinking of him as miles away from here—with the sea between us, in fact! I really could scarcely believe her, when Yolande came home the other day and told me."

"An old friend?" questioned Margery, quietly. "Did you say an old friend, Mrs. Kildare?"

"Well, Margery," she answered, colouring

faintly, "not exactly an old friend, perhaps, but still something more than a mere acquaintance. We met him at Heidelberg first of all, about three months ago. He was a student—studying medicine or something, there, I believe. I never dreamed of his coming to England, though, much less of finding him with you in Foxdale!"

The last words were uttered with impatience, bordering on anger, Margery noticed.

She glanced at Mrs. Kildare, and noticed likewise that she had bitten her nether lip until a bright red mark was showing plainly upon it.

"I was rather astonished, of course," Margery answered, slowly and guardedly, "to see that Yolande and Mr. Lynne recognised each other immediately. It seemed just—just a little strange."

"Naturally," laughed Mrs. Kildare, nervously; but she recovered herself speedily. "And does the young man suit Dr. Durham, may I inquire? Is he—this Mr. Lylph Lynne—likely to remain with you, Margery, do you think?"

"Certainly; so far as I know," Margery replied, flushing; for somehow the question jarred on her. "Indeed, my father himself says that he has never before had anyone whom he has liked so much. He says also—"

"I am rejoiced to hear it," interposed Mrs. Kildare, sweetly, yet with a poor attempt at a pretty smile. "Good-afternoon, dearest Margery—adieu!"

And waving her hand playfully, she tripped out at the great iron gates.

Very thoughtfully Margery continued her way up the steep and shadowy avenue; her steps lagging somewhat now, her head bent.

Soon Foxdale Castle rose up ahead of her—massive, turreted, silent as the grave.

The creepers were in bloom upon the dull-red walls of the mansion; the rooks were cawing lazily above the neighbouring woods.

Not a creature seemed to be stirring anywhere; but Margery heard the watch-dogs barking in their distant kennels.

She was conducted by the solemn man-servant through the beautiful old hall, with its magnificent pictures and armour and splendid oak staircase, straightway into the cool and lofty library where she found Lady Anne.

The still graceful and slender figure of Lady Anne Guest was seated at a table near a window; she was writing, Margery could see.

But she put aside her pen the moment the young girl entered, and came forward, smiling, to greet her.

Her thin patrician face, with the soft silver hair rolled back and crowned with a small cap of lovely lace, had brightened with pleasure. With Margery Durham, Lady Anne Guest was never a bit like "a fossil"—never "whalebone and vinegar" with her young favourite Margery.

"Margery," said she, in her quiet, sweet voice, embracing the girl affectionately—"Margery, I am very glad to see you, my child. I had begun to think that you were forgetting and deserting your old friend. It is not so, I trust!"

"Ah, no, no! Never think that," Margery told her earnestly.

Then they sat down together; and Margery Durham explained to Lady Anne how it was that she had not been up to the Castle before—the days hitherto had been so sultry; she had been out so seldom of late.

And then Margery inquired after the health of the Earl; and heard—as Mrs. Kildare had said—that Lord Beaumanoir was not so well to-day, and was still in his own room; but that he hoped by-and-by to come down to dinner, since Dr. Durham, when he paid his daily visit, had pronounced that the exertion would do him no harm.

And presently Lady Anne inquired of Margery, with an odd twitching of her delicate lips and a twinkle in her quiet gray eyes, whether or not it was correct, that Sir George Stoke was really simpleton enough to be thinking seriously of Yolande Kildare.

"I am quite out of the world, you know, Margery," Lady Anne Guest said, "and hear but little news except when your kind good father

himself brings me any. But this matter I allude to, dear, came from no less a person than Mrs. Kildare herself. She called and lunched here to-day—you must have met her—and talked a great deal about young Stoke and her daughter Yolande. She seemed to hint, in fact, that it might shortly turn out to be a settled affair between them. What an incorrigible old gossip I am, child, when I get the chance—am I not?"—patting Margery's hand with her own slim mitreoned one, which indeed was as white and unwrinkled as a girl's.

"Yes," Margery told Lady Anne, "I met Mrs. Kildare in the avenue; but she said nothing whatever to me about Yolande and Sir George Stoke. I dare say she thought that I should hear of it all from you, Lady Anne."

"Possibly dear," agreed Lady Anne Guest, drily.

She went on then to tell Margery Durham how sincerely glad she was to learn that her dear father had at length been fortunate enough to meet with a gentleman who, it appeared, was thoroughly capable of valuing him—Dr. Durham—in every way; and who, of course, would now take upon his own strong young shoulders a fair share of the doctor's burthen.

What a relief, opined Lady Anne, it must be to Dr. Durham to have found someone upon whom he could rely at all times as trustworthy—a real boon and blessing, she thought, after that dangerously incompetent youth who was gone!

Listening to Lady Anne's gentle talk, Margery raised her eyes instinctively to the library wall above the huge carved shelf of the lofty mantelpiece, where had hung, as long as she could remember, in its handsome gilt frame, a portrait in oils of the Earl of Beaumanoir—taken at a time when those wild oats of his lordship's were at their wildest, perhaps some five-and-twenty years before.

What a fine, well-favoured young scapegrace he must have been, thought Margery idly—how beautiful was the wide white brow, with its thick wavy sweep of tawny hair; how full of life, passion, and sweetness were those smiling deep-set eyes beneath their well-defined level brows.

But the mouth, the lower part of the face, was weak, vacillating, sensual, although—

In the next moment Margery Durham had uttered an exclamation of dismay; hardly conscious however that she had done so.

She felt faint and giddy. The cool spacious room, with its books and its hangings of claret cloth, seemed to have grown suddenly misty and unsteady.

"Margery, my dear," exclaimed Lady Anne, anxiously, "what is the matter, are you ill?"

"No—no! I think not. Only—only—perhaps—"

"My dear child, I see what it is—the walk over here has fatigued you too much," Lady Anne said hurriedly. "I will get you a glass of wine."

And she rose forthwith and hastened from the room.

"But I do not really need it. It is—it is troubling you very unnecessarily," Margery stammered, though longing to be alone, if only for a moment or two. "Really I am better, Lady Anne. It was merely a passing sensation of faintness. Believe me, I—I do not require—"

"I am the best judge of the matter, I think," Lady Anne Guest looked back to say firmly; and then quitted the library without more ado.

When left quite alone, Margery Durham pressed her hands tightly over her bewildered eyes, and then gazed up again at the portrait which hung there above the carved oak mantelpiece in the library at Foxdale Castle.

"Am I awake? Am I in my right senses?" she asked herself aloud, distinctly; her strained eyes still riveted on the pictured features of the Earl of Beaumanoir in his wild youth. "Yes, for it is there; there is indeed no error; I have found the likeness beyond all question now!"

For the mouth, the chin, the sensual lips, belonged to Lord Beaumanoir himself.

But the hair, the brow, and the beautiful clear eyes, were unmistakably those of Lylph Lynne.



## CHAPTER VI.

Time went on, and sunny July faded into sultry August; then August in due course yielded place to September, with stubbled fields and yellowing leaves, and the sound of the sportsman's gun falling daily on the melancholy air.

And although time had been travelling so quickly, or at any rate seemed to have been, for Margery Durham, lately, little of actual importance had really happened within the boundary line of her narrow world.

The Kildares remained at the Grange House; Sir George Stoke, of course, at Revelstoke. The Earl of Beaumanoir was yet alive; and Lyulph Lynne, quiet and grave as ever, was still a member of Dr. Durham's household in Foxdale.

Often, watching him, Margery fancied that he must be growing weary of their humdrum family life, and yearning perhaps for the more active and changeful experience he had known in the days before coming to their old-fashioned home.

Sometimes he looked tired and pale, as though he had slept ill; sometimes bored and restless; at other times like one who is anxious, yet without patient, thought Margery, under the constant irritation of inexorable delay.

As for their knowing more about him than they did when he first arrived, it would be decidedly untrue to assert that anything of the kind was the case; because they were as much in the dark concerning him as ever.

Aunt Susan Patchett indeed, had long ago abandoned as futile her attempts to find out "something of Mr. Lynne's antecedents."

With all her little traps, her blandishments and her wheedling ways, she had hitherto failed entirely to inveigle him into the slightest confidence or allusion even touching the history and the mystery of his past life.

So she had given it all up as "a bad job," and had perforce made up her mind to accept him with her usual good sense and good-nature, for just what he was in himself alone—that and no more.

He was always well-bred, courteous and kind invariably, but reserved on all points—most emphatically reserved; and that strict reserve of Lyulph Lynne's was verily as a suit of armour not to be penetrated.

Margery could not help admitting to herself that his unwavering reticence fretted her in no small degree. Somehow she had grown to think it both hard and unfair that he should not take her just a little into his confidence. She would have been so true a friend to him, she thought, if only the chance might be hers!

But this fretting and wounded feeling availed her nothing; and Mr. Lynne continued to keep his own counsel steadfastly and to go his own quiet way.

At all events, that is what Margery Durham believed unquestioningly in those early days.

But she has learned since, she knows for a certainty, now, that her own father, within less than a month from the date of Mr. Lynne's coming amongst them, and her father himself alone, had been admitted fully into the young man's secret, and had learned the complete story of his life from its very beginning.

Yes, he had deemed it right and wise, it seemed, to confide absolutely in Dr. Durham. The doctor, an honourable man, was satisfied. And his story was safe, Lyulph Lynne knew.

Of course, thought Margery afterwards, she might have had the shrewd sense to guess all along that her father himself was not, as their women folk were, in darkness and doubt, seeing that he and the young stranger were such excellent comrades, and seemed to understand each other so well.

And Margery herself, too, on her own account, had seen fit to hold her peace, and to maintain her own counsel, in more directions than one, and had said nothing to anyone about that singular discovery of hers in reference to the portrait in the library at Foxdale Castle.

She dared not tell her Aunt Susan, for her discretion was scarcely to be trusted; and since it was so passing strange, thought Margery, that her father, who was so frequently at the Castle,

should himself have failed to observe anything remarkable between the pictured face of Lord Beaumanoir as a young man, and the living features of Lyulph Lynne five-and-twenty years afterwards, in the present day, she had said nothing to the doctor either.

She had never had a secret of any kind whatsoever to carry about with her constantly, as it were, she used to think very sadly, before the coming of Lyulph Lynne.

"Am I mad, that I should cherish that which bears but bitter fruit?" sighed she one day, "I will pluck it from my bosom, though my heart be at the root."

Yolande Kildare, albeit she had shunned the doctor's house at first, had latterly taken to coming again.

Consequently an occasional meeting between herself and Mr. Lynne was inevitable.

The two, however, were at all times scrupulously civil to each other; and no one would have guessed, from their demeanour at least, that they were aught but slight acquaintances.

But Mrs. Kildare's treatment of Lyulph Lynne was cavalier in the extreme, to say the least.

In return, he ignored the lady and her airs utterly, her disdain and her covert insults alike—thus paying her back, as the saying goes, in her own coin.

Once they had invited him to a dinner at the Grange House—Margery heard afterwards that it was entirely Yolande's doing—a grand affair to which Dr. Durham, his daughter, and Aunt Susan were all going, but Mr. Lynne had coldly and courteously declined the honour, and after that the Kildares asked him no more.

Indeed, there had been a good deal of "gaiety" of one sort and another in Foxdale lately—what with dinner parties, tea-parties, and old maids' gatherings, with cards, wine, and sandwiches; at all of which Margery and Aunt Susan were invariably present.

Dr. Durham, manlike, had accompanied his women folk cheerfully enough to the dinners when they were certain to be good; but the other entertainments he had shaken his head at, and elected to stay away from.

The tea and sandwich parties, at any rate, he could not stand, he said.

As for Mr. Lynne, he had refused his invitations, one and all alike, all round, even as firmly as he had declined that one of the Kildares; and Dr. Durham, rather strange to say, seemed not in the least surprised at the "eccentric conduct"—as it was freely termed by Aunt Susan and other ladies—of his handsome young assistant.

Perhaps it was only natural that such markedly unsocial manners should excite comment and indignation in Foxdale where they were all so friendly and hospitable together, by fits and starts; and soon Mr. Lynne got himself spoken of as "proud," "stuck-up," "stand-offish," and so forth.

Surely, remarked people sarcastically, where Sir George Stoke, of Revelstoke, was to be met as an equal, Mr. Lyulph Lynne, without loss of dignity, could show himself as a guest in like manner!

Truly, he was a singularly silent and reserved young man, and one of your high and mighty ones, it would seem, into the bargain! But the irony was of the tea-and-muffin order, and wrought Mr. Lynne no harm.

And yet the inhabitants of the humbler portion of Foxdale were very fond of him, despite his reserved ways.

He was so wonderfully gentle with the sick people he visited; so patient, so quiet, so full of real sympathy for their dull hard lives and sorrows; and, above everything, so pitifully tender always with their poor little whimpering half-famished ones, who were called upon to pit their puny strength against that of disease and death.

"Doubtless," observed Aunt Susan satirically to him one day, upon the occasion of his saying flatly "No" to some unusually cozy tea-light, "you would prefer to dine *en famée*—as Mrs. Kildare would say—with Lord Beaumanoir and Lady Anne Guest, since they themselves, I believe, are about the only people we know in the neighbourhood who have not yet asked you to

their house! Are you waiting for an invitation from the Castle, Mr. Lynne?"

It was the proverbial shaft shot in ignorance and at random, and it flew straight home to its mark.

And although Aunt Susan was fortunately unconscious of the real success she had achieved, Lyulph Lynne's face had flushed suddenly, and then paled. He looked, indeed, deeply pained and annoyed.

"Yes," he answered, however, in a jesting tone—while his firm lips trembled visibly—"that is precisely what I am waiting for. You have guessed admirably, Mrs. Patchett, I must tell you."

"Then, young man," rejoined Aunt Susan Patchett, laughing drily, "I am afraid that you will have to go on waiting! For Dr. Durham is about the only person in Foxdale who ever breaks bread at the Castle. Is that not so, Margery?"

"Yes," said Margery briefly, feeling exceedingly indignant with Aunt Susan.

"I have a fund of patience," said Lyulph Lynne, calmly.

And that there was infinitely more in those six quiet words of his than her obtuse good-natured aunt dreamed for one moment, Margery herself felt as sure as she was of her own name.

So it came about at last that Dr. Durham said to his daughter Margery that he supposed he too ought to do something or other in return for the hospitality which they had been participating in so freely of late.

He generally gave two or three dinner-parties during the year, and it was quite time that he should give one now, said he in his genial way.

Accordingly the invitations were carried round by the surgery-boy, as was customary on these occasions, and every one of them was accepted by their several recipients, without a solitary refusal.

The Kildares would, of course, be present, and Sir George Stoke had accepted immediately; with the Rev. Timothy Price and his friend, the Rector of Slingford; Lawyer Johnson, his wife and daughters; and, wonderful to relate, Lady Anne Guest!

Dr. Durham had, indeed, had no little difficulty in persuading her, but somehow he had prevailed in the end.

The Earl, for the past week or two, had been so much better than usual, there was really no reason why Lady Anne should not come, Dr. Durham knew—the truth of the matter being that Lady Anne Guest was so habituated by long custom to the gloom and the solitude of Foxdale Castle, that all thought of more cheerful society and surroundings had for years past now grown, in a way, distasteful to her.

Still Dr. Durham was such an old, old friend—Lady Anne would have done a great deal to oblige him at any time.

So the Earl's sister had consented at last, and was coming with the rest.

She used always to grace the Durhams' parties in those days before Lord Beaumanoir had become so feeble and dependent on her.

Other notables in and round about Foxdale were bidden to the feast; but Margery Durham, at this date of her life, has quite forgotten who they were. It is such a long while ago, you see, and she is not a young woman now!

It was the evening before the dinner-party, and in Dr. Durham's household they had had a tiring day.

All the morning long Margery and Aunt Susan had been busy with Betty the cook in their great old red-bricked kitchen—making jelly, baking tarts, getting the soup forward, and a hundred other things besides.

Molly, in her pantry, had been cleaning silver. Sally, in the roomy china-closet, polishing glass.

The surgery-boy, on a stool in the scullery, had plucked the ducks and fowls for Betty and Aunt Susan to roast on the morrow.

And now that evening time was come, they were feeling somewhat fagged! Aunt Susan, indeed, as she rested from her labours, declaring as she lay back in her arm-chair in the great parlour after dinner, that she would sleep that

night as sound as a roach the moment she could get between the sheets.

"Still, there is one thing more I should like to do, my dear," said she, yawning, "before we have in the tea; and that is to cut out a fussy paper or two for the bottoms of the cruetes and the ham-knuckles—or perhaps, Margery child, you will be good enough to do it for me. If we put it off until to-morrow, we shall very likely forget all about it. I left the pink and white tissue paper in the breakfast-room. Will you go and fetch it, my dear!"

Margery got up and lighted a candle, yawning the while as sleepily as Aunt Susan herself, and went at once to do her bidding.

It was already past nine, as the loud hoarse voice of the old oak clock ticking in the hall was solemnly telling Margery.

"Distinct as a passing footstep's fall,  
It echoes along the vacant hall,  
Along the ceiling, along the floor,  
And seems to say at each chamber door,  
For ever—never!  
Never—for ever!"

Margery passed down the long and shadowy hall, and entered the chill deserted breakfast-parlour.

She placed her candle upon the table and looked round about her.

Ah yes! there lying forgotten on a chair was the parcel of flimsy tissue paper—pink, green, and white—which had been bought in Foxdale at little Miss Morgan's Berlin-wool shop late in the afternoon.

The house was always very silent at this hour, when, as a rule, Dr. Durham was shut up with his newspapers in the library, Mr. Lynne in the surgery, and the servants were at supper in the kitchen.

Margery took up the parcel she had come for, and was about to quit the room; when the sound of a voice, that seemed in distress, a woman's voice that she recognised immediately, smote like a knell on her ear and her heart together.

The door of the surgery—passage was ajar, as it not infrequently was.

And the sound of that voice—low, pleading, and pathetic—came surely and unmistakably from the dim-lit surgery to Margery Durham who stood there transfixed by its tones close by in the adjacent room.

Mr. Lynne, at this hour of the evening, was always to be found alone at his work, entirely alone, Margery was well aware; as indeed was someone else, it would appear.

With a single catch her breath seemed to leave her; and she clenched her hands and her teeth involuntarily.

She felt that she had paled like ashes.

And she knew, albeit she made not the slightest effort to save herself, that she was then on the brink of a most dishonourable act.

From the present she always looks back upon that hour with feelings of grief and shame unutterable; and she wonders sometimes whether after all it could really have been herself, Margery Durham, who played thus deliberately so contemptible a part!

To extinguish her light and to creep noiselessly along the dark wainscoted passage, to crouch low against the wall at the end there, where the half-glass door shut off the narrow dispensary, and to peer cautiously through the lower panes across which was strung the brown muslin blind—all this was the work of a few seconds only.

She nearly cried out in her pain and misery. No one but herself and Heaven knows what she suffered then!

(To be continued.)

THREE-THIRDS of the earnings of a Belgian convict are given to him on the expiration of his term of imprisonment. Some of them thus save more money in gaol than they ever saved before.

VINES grow at the height of 2,880ft. above the level of the sea, trees at 6,700ft., shrubs at 8,500ft., a few plants at 10,500ft.; beyond which are a few lichens, and vegetation ceases entirely at the height of 11,000ft. amid Arctic cold.

## TWO MARRIAGES.

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### CHAPTER XXXV.

On hearing this awful admission Gilbert Vernon shuddered visibly, and then making an effort to speak, went on in a hard voice,—

"So that was your door of escape. At what a price have you gained your freedom!"

"What price?" she asked, sharply.

"Murder!"

"Gilbert do you think that of me!" she asked, as she seemed to drag out the words one after the other, as if she were tugging at her very heartstrings.

"I do. Heaven help me and pity me," he responded, almost under his breath.

"And how—why?"

"How! why! Need you ask me? You wrote to me with your own hand that it would be well that some one would kill him, that you yourself questioned would it be a sin, that the world was well rid of such a monster, that if he drove you to extremities you had a sure door of escape!"

"Oh! Gilbert, surely I never wrote that, and if I did, remember I was nearly frantic. I scarcely knew what I was doing; I was not accountable."

"You knew well what you were doing, such excuses avail you not," he replied, sternly. "You distinctly threatened him with death in that letter, which I have burnt lest it fell into other hands and hang you, as you said you would gladly hang him; and two days after this the man was murdered—foully stabbed by, as all the papers knew, the woman who lived in the third floor. No one knows something that I know, that that woman was you. Disprove this if you can—if you dare, and be warned that nothing that you could urge will clear you to me. You did it."

"Here is fine justice!" she cried, passionately. "Justice at the hands of a man who was my husband. He accuses me of a frightful, horrible crime, and forbids me to open my lips and disprove my innocence, assuring me that if I do it will avail me nothing! Was ever any such wilful blindness seen? It is beneath me, sir, to stoop to clear myself when you are so ready to try and condemn me unheard. Glad, I see—but too glad—to seize on such a weapon as my evil fortunes have placed in your willing hands, to cut the slender cords that bind our lives together. I am aware, speaking with more deliberation, 'aware to my bitter cost, that appearances are fearfully against me'—she paused—"that the train of circumstantial evidence is, I may say, complete. Have I not read it all in the papers! my very eyes glazed with terror, my heart actually frozen with fear—I have hid myself; I am but a woman after all, my nerves have been sorely shaken. Heaven has tried me as silver is tried in the furnace."

"Stop!" he almost shouted, "leave Heaven alone; let us have no blasphemy."

"It is not blasphemy. There is one above who knows my innocence, who will see me cleared yet if there be justice there," pointing upwards as she spoke. "I have been sorely tried—husband, friends, home, children, name, have all been taken from me one by one. I have been crushed to the very earth. I come to you, whom I looked to through all these storms, as my one friend, faithful unto death. I come to you at last—at last, after I am released, hoping that with you I will at least meet with sympathy and comfort."

Here her voice broke for a moment.

"You receive me with scorn, horror, loathing! You accuse me of murder! Oh, it is too—too much! It is the last drop in my bitter cup! I wish that I were dead!"

And staggering back to the seat which was close to her she sat down, covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

She sat and sobbed, and sobbed, as if her very heart would burst, whilst Gilbert stood and looked at her gloomily, not knowing what to do—whether to walk on—(no!)—and leave her there

—(he could not bring himself to do that)—or to wait until she became somewhat calmer, and could listen to what she had to say.

After a few moments she was better. Her long-drawn sobs grew weaker; her outburst was over; she was wiping away her tears; she was calm once more.

"I had one thing to say to you," he said, approaching, thinking that she was about to make a great confession. "If you will leave me your address you shall hear of the children every three months."

"Not to see them?" in ungrateful surprise.

"No—not to see them!" decisively.

"Ah!" very bitterly, "I understand. And indeed, from your point of view, it were better that they learned to forget their mother—better, far, that they had never been born! To hear of them once in ninety days—what a boon!" with withering contempt.

"Will you leave me an address?" he returned.

"I answer that question by another, Will you believe that I am guiltless of the death of Peter Blaine?"

"I would give half my life to say not guilty, but I cannot—no, I cannot!"

"You think I was capable of hurrying that wretched man, with all his wickedness, thus suddenly into another world? Oh! oh, Gilbert!" in a heart-broken voice.

"You said so—you wrote it, and that was as bad!"

"I was nearly insane with grief and misery. I did not mean what I wrote. Do you believe I could keep such a terrible secret?"

"Yes," very sternly, "I believe you could! You are accustomed to keeping secrets. Look at the secret you kept from me, and the misery it has wrought from first to last—like a stone thrown into a pool—making circle after circle! Why—why did you not tell me you were married before when you married me? Why did you keep that secret? Tell me the reason, if reason you have."

"I was bound to keep it by a promise. Even if I had not been bound I would scarcely have had the courage to tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because I loved you. I was afraid that if you knew of this other marriage—such as it was—I might at once sink in your eyes as an impressionable, weak, silly girl, who had given her first and best feelings to the first comer without a moment's hesitation, and you would treat my love second-hand—cheap—not worth having."

"I did love you then, and for many a day. You have killed my love for you now—here—for ever! There had best be no mention of the word between us. About the address?" he said, in a harsh, stern voice.

"It is utterly beneath me to take such a paltry crumb!" she said, hotly, "even although I am starving for a word about them. I will hear of them somehow. I will not leave my address."

"What is your present name—Blaine?"

"Mrs. George. Still, it is not my name, I know, but it does as well as another. The last word before we part—you are still of the same mind about that?" looking at him with her very soul in his face.

"Still—yes," with a hasty gesture of impatience.

"Then go!—go!" waving him away, and averting her face. "We were parted once before through no fault of our own; we are parted now by yours! On your head be it—we part for ever."

"Her mind is surely affected," said Gilbert to himself, as he walked home rapidly, gun on shoulder, a good deal shaken by his long and agitating interview; but one thing he was not shaken in—his belief that Mrs. Blaine had been the murderess of her husband.

### CHAPTER XXXVI.

Two or three months went by; "the Gordon-square murder" was now an old story, and had been eclipsed long since by other tragedies.

Miss Fane had taken up her abode under Lady Fanny's roof, as it gave her many additional



facilities for seeing her cousin Gilbert. She was, to all appearances, a very mother to his two boys and most passionately devoted to them both. This was patent to the whole household, and more than one of them had made the remark that "she would make a model stepmother."

Gilbert began to see that he could not quarter these children on his aunt always—not that she had any objection, nor to the very handsome quarterly cheques paid into her bankers; but he liked to have them more to himself, in some kind of home of his own. But how! and where!

There ought to be a woman at the head of it; and who was that woman to be? His mind dwelt reluctantly on Miss Fane.

She was a slave to the boys as it was; she would be the very best person to replace their erring mother—the best for them; but query, would she be the best for him?

Scarcely; but, then, he could not have everything. Another young lady, that might suit him, might not care for them. Certainly, Lizzie had been most treacherous about that address—she had betrayed the miserable Georgie into Mr. Blaine's very hands; but then, had she not confessed, with sobs and tears to him lately, "that she thought that she was acting all for the best and for his most important interests."

Thus he was muzzled; if he opened his lips tears (crocodile) came into her narrow light eyes, and she would sigh,—

"Gilbert, I did it all for the best—all for you. I may have been wrong; but, you see, she did not really care for you, much less the children," wiping her eyes in a plaintive manner. "She has made no attempt to see the darling boys, nor you; she has forgotten you, and you know she is a rich woman—not bad-looking. She will sink her past life, as she did before, and marry again."

"The boys were certainly being spoiled," thought their father, with some uneasiness. "They were too much with women, and he only saw them when he came to lunch now and then at Queen Elizabeth's gardens. They were too young to be sent to school. What was to be done?"

"Marry your cousin Lizzie," said his aunt, very promptly. "She has money—she is well-born—not too young and giddy—she has no secrets in her past, no fearful surprises in store for you! Marry her, and you will be a wise man. She will make you an excellent wife; and let me tell you, my dear boy, that it is not everyone who would have you now, saddled as you are with these two children; and with such a strange experience in your past it is not every young girl who would care to be the real Mrs. Vernon!"

Her nephew said nothing, but coloured hotly, and dug his cane viciously into her good Brussels carpet.

There was truth in what she said, though she had not presented it in the most palatable fashion.

It was not everyone who would care to be his wife—he was no great catch now—he could not afford to be particular, and there was no doubt but that the boys would be better under his own eye, and that Lizzie would have him.

So before he took his leave he told his aunt that he "did not wish to make up his mind in a hurry; he would never, never dream of marrying again, only for the sake of Alick and Jack, that he would promise her to think of what she said; but implored her earnestly to let it go no further."

This promise she kept. She only allowed it to go as far as Miss Fane, and that was quite far enough. Miss Fane saw her hopes about to be realised at last, though he had not actually said anything as yet.

"Why," she asked herself, angrily at times, "was her mind so desperately set upon her cousin Gilbert? Even now he did not care about her. Never mind, he should and would some day!"

Lady Fanny cleverly managed to have them alone whenever he called, and although Miss Lizzie gave him several openings, still he was dumb! Never so dense a man. The truth was, he had tried more than once to bring his courage to the sticking point, and failed. No matter how charming Lizzie was, how exquisitely and becomingly dressed, how sympathetic, he told

himself as a wife he knew he could never stand her. He could not get over that business about the address; no matter how she buried it and toned it down, it sprang up again. She was deceitful, and the other had been deceitful. All women were deceitful. He was glad he had no daughter, and now, on second thoughts, he would just set up house again alone, and take the boys home. "Better to bear the ill you know," &c.

Miss Fane wondered at his dilatoriness. Here was a laggard in love with a vengeance. He was too bad.

A little paragraph, emanating from, we will not say whom, appeared in certain society papers, under the head of "Approaching Marriages in High Life": "We understand that Gilbert Vernon, Esq., of Alton Manor, Wareshire, will shortly lead to the altar his cousin, Miss Elizabeth Augusta Fane, only surviving daughter of the late General Mowbray Fane, of Easting, Hampshire."

Gilbert saw this at his club, and dropped the paper as if it had burnt him. He was accosted with no end of questions, congratulations, and chaff, which drove him nearly into a frenzy. He stoutly denied the soft impeachment, and sat down there and then and wrote to the editor, requesting him to have this paragraph contradicted at once, as there were no grounds for it whatever.

He felt quite ashamed to go near Lady Fanny's, and only devoutly hoped that they had not seen the paper—vain hope. He was dining there that evening, and during the meal not a word on the subject had been uttered, nor had his aunt touched upon it during the few minutes that he and she had been in the drawing-room alone, and he breathed freely, but after dinner she went into a little back snuggery for her forty winks, when she did not like to be disturbed, and this left the cousins the other apartment to themselves.

She, Lizzie, was exquisitely dressed in a pale blue dress, with a square cut body and long train that lay behind her in soft folds on the carpet, as she leant her sharp elbow on the mantelpiece, and looked at her own face in the glass, then at Gilbert's. He was looking down into the fire. She was sure that he had seen it! Would he not speak now! He was going to speak. He looked up and met her eyes, and said,—

"Fancy to-morrow week being Christmas-day. I never thought of it till Alick reminded me."

"Yes, how time flies," she replied, sentimentally.

"Flies!" he echoed. "Crawls, you mean."

"And yet it does not seem so long since that strange Christmas two years ago," she replied. "You remember our walking to church, Gilbert? What a lovely Christmas morning!—a real white world—and my pointing you out those footsteps in the snow! And you were quite angry, were you not?"

"I remember it only too well. I have hated the name of Christmas-day ever since. Last year, thank goodness, there was nothing to remind me of it. I was up at a little mountain village in Japan, where they had never heard of such a day, and I did not enlighten them, you may be sure."

"No, I suppose not," looking at her rings. "By the way," suddenly changing her tone for a more playful key, "were you not highly amused at that announcement in the *Looking Glass* about us?" darting a glance at him.

Gilbert's breath was for a moment suspended, and then he said,—

"Then I am afraid you have seen it—I am exceedingly sorry—"

"Why need you be?" she interrupted—"I don't mind in the least if," with another glance from under her eyelashes, "you don't."

Gilbert was conscious that he minded very much indeed, and that he had never been at a more complete loss for an answer in the whole course of his life. This speech of his cousin savoured strongly of a plain offer of her hand in marriage. What on earth was he to do? Perhaps the lady noticed his perturbation, and assigned it to a wrong cause. She had had, as we know, a hint from her aunt—perhaps she interpreted silence for consent; for presently she

said, in her most dulcet tones, and laying her hand upon his coat sleeve,—

"We have known each other all our lives. I know all the dreadful story of yours—and why should it not be, Gilbert? I have no objection."

"I—I—it could not—it is impossible. If I could give you even a scrap of affection it should be, if you would have me, Lizzie, but it would be wronging you to ask you to marry me just for the boys' sake."

"No, no," she interrupted, eagerly; "I will marry you for their sakes, and you will care for me, then, for my own—"

"Stop—stop, Lizzie, it can never—never be. My very heart is withered, if there is such a thing. I shall be happier alone. I want no womankind, and you would bitterly repent the day you had honoured me by becoming my wife. I know you would. I never was a specially good-tempered fellow, and I'm a regular bear now. I'm not fit to be any woman's husband—no one could stand me."

"I will run the risk, Gilbert," she said, tenderly; "I have always cared for you, you know I have, and I will reform you, and make you happy—and, as the paragraph has appeared, we may as well make the best of it."

"But I have contradicted it most explicitly," said Gilbert, emphatically; "and I cannot think who it was that took such a monstrous liberty with our names."

"Contradicted it, have you? Oh!" in a tone of the keenest disappointment. Then, trying a new tack, and beginning to weep—"It is no matter for you—a man, Gilbert—but, oh! it is a dreadful—dreadful slur on me. People—people will say you have jilted me," now sobbing aloud, her shoulders shaking with emotion—"they will say dreadful things, you know they will."

Gilbert stared at his cousin in dismay. Matters were getting worse and worse, but he was resolved not to give in. No, he would not allow her to wring the fatal word from him, for it was an invasion of the usual laws of society—it was he that was asked so say "yes." Lizzie should not put the fatal halter round his neck. No—he would hang himself first; he would be deaf to her sobs, blind to her tears—in stoicism was safety.

Miss Fane glanced at him through her fingers, and decided that now or never was the moment to give him the *coup de grace*. She was not going to lose Alton Manor and all the Vernon family diamonds just for a mere ridiculous straining at a gnat—she who was fully capable of a whole camel! So she made a sudden impulsive gesture, as though calling the stars to witness her woes, and suddenly reposed her scented locks upon her cousin Gilbert's shrinking shoulder.

This, to him, was terrible. He would, if he dared, have thrust her rudely back, and let her fall upon the carpet; but she had become now as limp as a rag, and as heavy as lead.

He swore fiercely under his moustache awful maledictions upon all womankind, from Eve downwards, and looked about eagerly for the nearest armchair into which he might drop her.

As he and she were standing in this very tender attitude, he holding her up and looking anxiously round, she resting heavily in his arms, a footman entered, started back, but on second thoughts considered it better to put a bold face upon it, and have seen nothing.

He had a salver in his hand, and a telegram to Mr. Vernon sent on from the Club.

"Here, Jones," said Gilbert, taking the orange envelope in his disengaged hand; "Miss Fane has fainted! The fire has been too much for her. Just send her maid here, will you?" now ruthlessly depositing his fair burden in a chair—an easy chair—with her head well laid back, and saying to himself—"That she was a good deal heavier than he would have believed, and he would not be caught alone with her again in a hurry."

He then stood facing her, and opened the envelope and read the telegram, which ran as follows:—

"To G. VERNON, Esq.—From John Smith, Carlton Club, London.—I have seen the notice in

the *Looking Glass* of to-day. Do not be rash—your wife is living!”

He read this over two or three times in sheer amazement. What did it mean?

John Smith was, of course, a feigned name. Who had sent it—had she?

“Do not be rash!” No, certainly he would not be rash; no need to tell him that, and he glanced surreptitiously at Lizzie lying prone in the chair.

As he glanced he observed that her eyes were wide open, like a cat’s, and she was looking eagerly at the telegram that he held in his hand.

“What is that?” she said, feebly.

He answered by putting it into her lap.

When she had mastered its contents she recovered. She sat up and found her natural force, and said, with wonderful clearness,—

“I suppose she sent it?” she demanded. “She is capable of anything—of any lie!” viciously.

“I told you once before that you were never to mention that person to me!” he said, sternly. “If you do it another time I will never speak to you again!”

“A pretty way you speak to me now! After such treatment of me, too,—after our marriage being in the paper—after all you said to Aunt Fanny. Oh! what wretches men are!” seizing the telegram and crushing it up in her hands, in a kind of frenzy. “I wish to goodness the whole race was extinct!”

“Ditto to your sex!” returned Gilbert, laconically. “And there is your maid. I sent for her, thinking that you might require her services; I’m not use to these fainting fits. Say good-night to Aunt Fanny, Lizzie, and I hope you will be all right to-morrow. You may give me that telegram, please,” holding out his hand for the crumpled ball of paper. “Good-night!”

So saying he walked across the room, opened the door, and went out, a bang downstairs announcing his final departure.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

Two days later Gilbert Vernon, who was still in London, received another telegram—again from John Smith. This one said:—

“I have important news for you—I wish to see you to-day. Be at St. Clement Dane’s Church at five o’clock, and follow my messenger.”

This came to the club at three o’clock, and during the next hour-and-a-half Gilbert was a prey to as many changes of mind almost as there were moments.

He had heard of people being carried away, and robbed by thieves under all manner of precious pretences—aye, not only robbed, but murdered, never heard of again. Still, this John might throw lights upon various gloomy passages of his life, passages that had been passed through within the last two years. He would venture. “Nothing venture, nothing win.”

As the time drew near he grew impatient and restless. He took up a paper—he put it down—he went and looked in at the whist-tables, and came away—he took a turn into the smoking-room. He did not remain a moment—what though Skippy Trevor was making his heave’s sides ache with one of his capital stories!

It was now twenty minutes past four, and dark; but a fine, frosty evening. He would walk to the rendezvous. Accordingly, he put on his top-coat, a silk muffler, and taking a stout stick in his hand set out for his mysterious assignation.

He was the first—the first for fully a quarter of an hour. He began to feel cold, to feel impatient—to wonder if he had been made a fool of—to wonder if he might not as well go home instead of loitering there against the railings with every chance of being told to “move on.”

Five minutes more and he would go; but ere the five minutes were spent a hansom dashed up at great speed. The horse all covered with foam, jerked on to his haunches, and a great, big, gaunt old woman, in a shepherd’s plaid shawl and straw bonnet, descended and looked about her.

Seeing Gilbert she came up quickly to him, and said,—

“Beg pardon, sir, if I’m making any mistake. Be you Mr. Vernon?”

“Are you John Smith?” he said cautiously.

“That’s it,” she said. “It’s not my name; but it will do—my real name is Ann Halliday. My niece wants to see you sorely, sir. Get in—get in,” almost driving him before her into the vehicle.

The rattling over the loose stones and the roar of the other traffic almost entirely drowned their voices, conversation was impossible.

There was nothing for Gilbert to do but to wait with what patience he could till he saw the end of this odd adventure. This woman’s niece, who could she be? He had never seen this hard-featured old person in his life before, and, moreover, unless his olfactory nerves deceived him, she smelt of gin.

“I never saw you before, sir,” she roared into his ear; “but I did you a good turn once. I wrote to you from Hillford about a black cabinet. I dreamt the will was there—I knew it was somewhere—and I was right, though dreams, they do say, go by contraries. I was the old man’s housekeeper.”

“But what about your niece?” he shouted back. “What does she want with me? Where is she? Who is she?”

“She had a word on her mind. She has been talking to the priest all day. He said she was to send for you at once; not an hour, no, not a moment, was to be lost; a terrible wrong has been done to some one. My head is that bothered I don’t know rightly who. Either it’s you or it’s a lady; but you will hear soon enough. We haven’t far to go.”

“And what’s your niece’s name?” he asked.

“Here we are,” said his companion, as the hansom stopped in front of a row of cheap-looking, red-brick houses, with narrow little gardens in front of them, and green iron railings.

“I’ll keep you to take me back,” said Gilbert to the driver as he got out, with a view of making a good retreat in case of the worst.

“Aye, very well,” remarked the old woman. “He will be some time, but there’s a comfortable house (meaning public) just round the corner. You come away in with me, sir; she’s worrying to see you, that I know. She can’t die with this on her mind, and I’m afraid it’s something bad—I’m main afraid it’s bad.”

“But you have not told me her name yet,” said her companion, following her into a very narrow little hall, lit by one dip candle in a tin candlestick.

“Her name! Oh! then much good her married name has done her—was an unfortunate name for her. Didn’t I tell you her name was Blaine—Mrs. Blaine?”

Gilbert staggered against the wall as he heard this announcement. And had Georgie come to this—and was she dying? Was this drunken-looking old woman her aunt—this messenger she had despatched to hear her confession? Needless to tell him—he knew all—and dying—

He stood for a moment in a stuffy little parlour whilst Mrs. Halliday climbed upstairs to announce him, and, as he stood there, the whole place, floor and ceiling, seemed to reel with him—the small round table, the black horsehair sofa, the little clock, the white antimacassar, were whirling round and round in a giddy circle.

He was obliged to sit down, and lean his head on his hands, to try and recover from this unexpected shock. As he sat there, he felt a heavy, claw-like grip on his shoulder, and a voice said,—

“She’s ready for you now. Don’t say much, nor excite her more nor you can help—she’ll hardly last the night out. Come on,” imperiously.

And he did come on as desired. He groped his way up the narrow little stairs, and found himself ushered into a bedroom—a small, meanly-furnished apartment—no curtains to the windows, but there was a good fire in the grate, and beside it, sitting in a chair, propped up with pillows sat a young woman, with the seal of death on her face—with awful, hollow, hectic cheeks, and hollow, glittering, sunken eyes—but a woman he

had never, to the best of his recollection, set eyes on before in the whole course of his life.

The door was shut behind him, and he and this stranger were alone. He stood irresolutely, thinking that there must be some mistake, looking interrogatively at the shrunken figure near the fire, that gazed back at him.

“Come in, sir,” she said at last; “I know you well, though you don’t know me. You see before you a rare wicked woman—penitent and sorry enough for her sins now, and wanting to make amends to those she has wronged before it is totally too late.”

“You are sure you are making no mistake?” said Gilbert, now taking a seat at some distance. “I’m sorry to see you, whoever you may be, so ill; but I think you are making some mistake.”

“No mistake at all. I’m—my right name is Mrs. Blaine—”

Here she was interrupted by a frightful fit of coughing, and for fully three minutes gasped and gasped for breath.

“I’m all right now,” she panted at last, “and please let me talk while I can. We did a terrible, terrible wrong to poor Mrs. Vernon—your wife! Peter did it for money, and he made me do it for nothing. Aye; Peter was a force man!”

“Do what?” demanded Gilbert, in a sharp voice.

“I’ll tell you all in time. I was housemaid at the Blaines, and the young gentleman, Mr. Peter, fell in love with me. His people was mad—mad, and I was sent about my business. However, it made no difference, for he knew where I went to, and we were married; here are our lines,” handing a slip of paper which Gilbert reached for mechanically.

“Then Peter got into trouble and left the country and left me, and I took service again. I rarely heard from him, unless asking for money; he came home to his people very poor, and hearing Miss Georgie Gray was to have a great fortune he made up to her, as you know, and married her, on the sly. It was bigamy of course; but he never expected I would turn up again, and he wanted her fortune sorely. Well, he was disappointed; it went to the Vancos. He then gave out he was dead, never meaning to come home no more.”

She paused for a moment panting like some hard-pressed animal.

“Well,” she proceeded, “then Miss Gray—for she never was aught else, in spite of the jugglery at Portsmouth, when she was a poor foolish child—was married to you, and she would have heard no more of Peter, only for the coming in for all the money in the end, partly owing to a dream of my aunt’s, the old man’s housekeeper; and when Peter heard of this of course, he craved for it, and back he came, as hard as he could, meaning to have what he called his share—meaning all. He had a kind of notion that you and Mrs. Vernon being so fond of one another, would try to buy him off, to keep what he pretended was his secret, for your own sakes.”

Here Gilbert breathed to himself half-a-dozen maledictions.

“For, as he knew, you were lawful man and wife all the time; but he made you think different, and you were easily persuaded, and what he called too proud and too proper to keep the matter quiet, let things go on as usual. Besides, he said, she had a temper like a wild cat.”

“Well, Peter broke up your home, and made a lot of mischief, and got you out of the country and then fell in with me. I was fond of Peter, and I made friends with him. I was in all his secrets; it was I as fetched her away that time; I’m—was Mary Todd; she knew me as Miss Fane’s maid.”

“When he got her to Gordon Square—my! how she went on! She was just like a wild thing; she wanted to jump clean through the window, and, aye, she said awful things to Peter—he struck her! I told him it was a shame, and she a lady, and so delicate looking and not his wife or anything; but her mouth, it did bleed rarely; but she never cried, nor was a bit cowed—only fiercer than ever!”

“Pace, sir, by your face, that this is a terrible hearing for you, and I’ve been a wicked woman.



I thought of nothing but fine clothes and diamonds—her diamonds. I've them here; I sold her clothes, and her sealakin, and the stars, but I kept the necklet.

"We, Peter and I, were fine people, and kept a lot of company. I had a carriage and maids of my own, but she was a kind of conscience in the house, a skeleton in the cupboard, all the while shut upstairs.

Peter, he and I used to quarrel, and he drank at times just awful! and I—well you must just know all first as well as last—I drank too, to drown care, as it were, and keep myself cheerful, for I could not be very cheery when I thought of that poor young lady upstairs!

"She gave me letters for you to post, but I burnt them, of course—and how she would cry at times! I cry and sob for her two little boys; but at last she got quieter—she stopped walking, walking, walking, and sobbing at nights, and beating her hands on the doors. She used to keep me awake, I can tell you, many an hour. She got quiet and sullen like, and then, it seems, somehow she got hold of the key and got away."

"And is that all you have to tell me?" said Gilbert, now standing up with a face as white as death.

"No, no—the worst is to be told yet," she said, suddenly covering her face with her hands; "but I was not myself when I did it," shivering as she spoke.

"Then—in a low, hard-struck voice—"you did it!"

"I did," she returned in a broken whisper. For a moment or two there was a dead silence.

This miserable woman, this dying creature, had killed her husband with her own hand.

Georgie was innocent! Georgie had been everyone's unhappy scapegoat.

Georgie was his wife—his wife, who had been reft from him—from that wicked scoundrel whom Nemesis had overtaken on his own hearth, but whom Gilbert felt, as he looked back on his career, that he had deserved to swing by the hands of the common hangman.

What could ever make up to Georgie for all she had suffered! And how was he ever to gain her pardon!

"I may as well finish!" gasped the miserable object before him. "One night Peter and I had an awful quarrel—partly about money, partly about a woman. He had been taking a lot of brandy—raw brandy; so had I. It was that. We got to high words; we got to blows. He cursed me; he called me vile names. He struck me; and I, filled with some kind of demon, turned on him with the nearest thing I could find. It happened to be a knife. I made for him, and missed him. I saw by his eyes he would kill me, and I struck at him again hard, and he fell. I did not know for sure if he was dead—at first I was afraid to look. I poured out a lot of brandy, and drank it raw; that gave me heart; it was like fire inside me. I went to him and pulled out the knife. He was dead! I threw the knife in the fire, and turned off the gas, and made my way to bed.

"I was too dazed and stupid with drink to care if I was found out or not. I lay and slept like a log till morning, and then came the hubbub!—and she was missing. There was her footprint all the way down the stairs!—She done it, everyone said; and I—no one dreamt of me.

"I stayed up in my room as much as I could; and then I gathered all the money and clothes I could together, and went off in a cab. I never said where—not likely I would go back to that house. I was—you will think it strange—very sorry for Peter. I felt as if someone else had done it; but, then, I knew I had—his awful dead face looking up at me from the floor used to give me no peace at nights. I seemed to see it in the dark, even if I shut my eyes. It's quite true what people say about 'murder will out'—you can't keep it. I would have told, only I knew there was no need.

"I was dying. It's the drink! I could not leave it off—drink is killing me. Can you not

say a word to me, sir, to ease my mind!" she added, piteously; "just one little word."

"What can I say!" he said, speaking with a visible effort. "My forgiveness will avail you nothing. But as far as it goes I give it to you. We are all sinners—some worse than others. It ill becomes me to refuse to listen to a fellow-creature who is to stand before another Judge so soon. But—no; I will say no more."

And, indeed, here his voice failed him.

"Oh, sir! Oh! if I could only see Mrs. Vernon I would be happier, if she would listen to me, not that I deserve it. I'm too bad, too wicked, for any lady to come and speak to. His Reverence told me to send for you. I believe that was his reason."

"I can't tell you anything about Mrs. Vernon." How strange to utter the well-known name again! "I don't know where she is, but I'll go now, when I leave this, and try and find her. I have wronged her. I thought she was guilty of—of—that crime in Gordon-square!"

"Oh! sir, oh! Mr. Vernon, if you know her—"

"Yes, I ought to have known better; and now I have no time to lose. Mary Todd—I cannot call you by that other name—guilty woman as you are, you have raised the cares of life from my shoulders this evening. You have restored me my wife and children; you have made some amends at last. What can I do for you? Is there anything that I can procure, anything in my power? Name it!"

"You are too good to me, sir; nothing. And if I were starving I would not presume to take from you after all I have cost you. Here are two things—the diamonds, pulling out a case, and these marriage lines—no use to me now, and she might wish to see them. She will be glad to know that she never was anyone's wife but yours. I can well understand that!"

In five minutes more Gilbert, with the diamonds and the certificate in his pocket, was tearing off in the direction of the West-end of London, having slipped a good sum of money into Mrs. Halliday's ready palm for the use of her niece, or for the funeral.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

GILBERT VERNON need not have been in such a hurry after all, for when he got back to his club and began to sort his ideas, he remembered that he had no means of discovering his wife's address (yes, she was really and truly his own wife again), excepting through her bankers, and her bankers were not his bankers. Very early, in fact the moment the doors were open, he was on the spot, eager to see the manager.

After some delay he was shown into the manager's private room, and found himself standing before a very polite, elderly man, with a most piercing pair of eyes, who looked at him critically, and asked "what he could do for him!"

These young fellows mostly came to borrow money, but that was not this gentleman's errand. He wanted a lady's address. This was something quite out of the common. He wanted the address of a nice, young, pretty customer—Mrs. George.

The manager hem'd and haw'd, "and really very much regretted that such a proceeding was quite out of the question. Mrs. George's address was given him in—ah," with a sudden burst of candour, "he might say in confidence."

"You receive her letters and forward them, do you not?"

"Occasionally, I may say we do." "I must have her address. It is of the last importance," said Gilbert, impatiently. "You will scarcely withhold it from me when I tell you that I am her husband."

The manager now arranged his glasses, and scrutinised his visitor as keenly as if he were a doubtful cheque, and then said, "Mr. Vernon, I think," taking up his card. "You are Mr. Vernon, I presume!"

"Yes, and the lady I wish to communicate with is Mrs. Vernon."

"Oh, indeed! then in that case there is a

mistake. We have no one of that name on our books."

"It is the same person!" emphatically. "It may be," dubiously; "at any rate, we have no authority to divulge Mrs. George's, alias Mrs. Vernon's address. You had better go to your solicitors—"

"That's not a bad idea; thank you," quickly rising, "I will go to hers, since I can get nothing out of you."

"Very sorry we cannot oblige you—but it's not business," bowing. "Ah! good morning."

"What did the fellow want coming here bothering! A likely thing to give Mrs. George's address. If they were to do so, she would probably withdraw her account like a shot, and it was a pretty big one. No, no! my fine young gentleman! you must find her for yourself—no easy matter!"

Her former men of business knew nothing whatever about her. Mr. Blaine had taken her affairs out of their hands. They were rather bitter about Mr. Blaine and his proceedings, and had, of course, had an inkling, nay more than an inkling, of the terrible catastrophe in the Vernon family—the appearance of a said-to-be-dead husband upon the scene!

Now, Gilbert, in quick, short sentences, passionately poured forth to the family lawyers his own and his wife's wrongs, lodged the certificate of Mr. Blaine's first marriage with them, and considerably opened their eyes.

He told them that found Mrs. Vernon must be; no money, if it took every shilling he possessed, must be spared, nor a moment lost in setting the quest on foot that very day—nay, that hour!

His lawyers sat in amazement to see their usual cool, nay, rather nonchalant client in the character of a man full of fire, recourse, and energy, suggesting this, advising that, ordering the other thing!

Between his visit to the bank and his visit to the solicitors the morning was gone; but the day must not pass until Lady Fanny—aye, and Lizzie Fane—knew all.

They were toying with a delicate late lunch when Gilbert came in, looking unusually hurried and excited, and somehow different. What had happened! They would know soon enough.

"Yes, I'm starving; and if, as you say, there are plenty of hot cutlets, I'll be glad to see them. Aunt Fanny and Lizzie," when the servant had left, "I cannot wait to tell you! It's all right about Georgie; she was my wife all the time, and is still!"

This was by no means good news to at least one of his present audience. She became very pale and rigid-looking; but Gilbert, a stranger to any good news for so long, was full of his subject, needless to say.

"She has been the victim of a most awful conspiracy. That other man was nothing to her at all; he had a wife alive at the time!"

"How do you know this?" rather scornfully.

"Because she sent for me yesterday, handed over her marriage certificate, made a clean breast of it—the whole plot. It was to get Georgie's money, nothing more!" he returned, speaking very rapidly.

"Gracious!" ejaculated Lady Fanny, "I never heard of such awful wickedness, never!—never in all my life!"

"But she did marry this—that Blaine!" put in Lizzie.

"Yes, went through the form at a registry-office when she was a silly girl. She never saw him again till he turned up at the Manor to levy black mail, his wife being in the secret."

"They must have got a great deal of money from her!" in a tone of regretful conjecture.

"Pretty well—nine thousand pounds and nearly all her own jewellery! But what is that?—nothing!"

"Not the Vernon diamonds!" with a shriek.

"No! not the Vernon diamonds! But," much hurried, "you seem to think more of them than her and all she has suffered, Aunt Fanny!"

"Oh, it's been all very terrible, no doubt, and I can assure you my brain is in a whirl—one day Mrs. Vernon, another Mrs. George, then Blaine, then back to Mrs. Vernon again."

"Mrs. Vernon she has been always. If I had not been a hot-headed fool I would not have given in so easily. I am sorry you and Lizzie have so little sympathy with one of your own sex, who has been such an innocent victim, and who has suffered so much, and so little compassion for me."

"Lady Fanny and Lizzie at once, now they saw how the wind blew, said a great many things from the lips out, only they were in their hearts very sorry that affairs had taken this most unexpected turn."

"Ring the bell, Gilbert, and we will go upstairs and have a comfortable talk—I really feel all of a shake."

"Yes; and, if you don't mind, I should like to have the boys down, Aunt Fanny."

"You are never going to tell them?" in a tone of severe reproof.

"I don't know what you think I am going to tell them. I shall tell them one thing that I hope will come true, and that is, that they will have their mother with them soon," speaking in a freighting tone.

"Oh! yes, of course—I suppose so. Where is she?"

"I am sorry to say I do not know. I wish from my heart I did."

"Have you not seen her since you came home?"

"Yes, once," colouring at the mere recollection of that terrible interview in the Lover's Walk. "Ah! here you are," to Alick and Jack, "come here, and let me see you."

No need for the invitation—they were already climbing up like two young bear-cubs, and administering two or three huge apices.

Miss Fane sat opposite, and believed she could read her cousin's thoughts. When he put down Alick, and pushed the hair back from his eyes, he looked at him, she told herself, with fatherly pride, saying inwardly, to himself. "This boy is my hair, and a real Vernon." But to the younger he was different, if less proud. His look was more lingering, more tender. He looked into the child's deep grey eyes, and patted his curly locks.

"Ah!" she said to herself, with inward fury; "that is because he is so like her—anyone can see that he is Gilbert's favourite. Horrid little wretch, I always hated him and always will!" These pleasant sentiments she prudently kept to herself, and, calling over the two boys, kissed them effusively, saying, after they had gone to the windows—"Dear children, what a difference this will make to them."

As to that hateful, awkward quarter-of-an-hour with Gilbert only three days ago, she was resolved to ignore it completely. Fancy, all but proposing to a married man!—but then who had ever expected this? She must be civil to her when she did come back, or there would be no more pleasant visits to the Manor.

When she did come back—aye, that was it. A week went by, Christmas was over, and still there were no tale or tidings of Mrs. Gilbert Vernon. The solicitors were helpless, private inquiry agents completely at sea. She appeared to have a faculty for hiding—practice makes perfect.

All the same, Gilbert went home, taking with him the two boys. The Manor was opened up in the old fashion, the house filled with servants, a nursery governess set to rule over the two children, and it was generally given out, in a quiet way, that it was all a mistake about Mrs. Gilbert all along, and the only thing that they wanted now was to have her at home once more.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

CHRISTMAS was passed at the Manor. It was a very festive season for the poor, for the smaller tenants, in short, for the parish in general—"a splendid Christmas," as their stockings testified, to Jack and Alick, and there was high holiday in the servants' hall, but it was a sad and dull enough anniversary for the master of the house when he sat alone over the fire, after the boys had gone to bed, and when the servants were

carousing downstairs. However, "hope springs eternal in the human breast."

Another week, another day might bring her! Such a thing as baffling the very best "private inquiry office" in England could not be done by any ordinary young woman—surely not! But that was just the thing that Georgie was not. She had gone through so much of recent years that she was always expecting the unexpected; always prepared for anything, for what had always latterly come to her—the worst.

She was sharp, quick, decided in all her movements now. She was hardened, though not in the way that Gilbert had accused her of being hardened; and, moreover, she was a rich woman and had four thousand a year at her back; knew how to bribe, was bitterly unforgiving to Gilbert for the wrong he had done her, and did not choose to be found out.

And so time went on. January passed, and the only remarkable event to signalise it at the Manor was that the drawing-room, boudoir, and Mrs. Vernon's own apartments were done up with lavish magnificence—money no object—done up in her favourite colours, her taste remembered and studied down to the smallest detail.

A new landau was ordered, a pony-carriage, a pair of Russian ponies; Mrs. Vernon's own hack was kept in constant exercise, ready to be used the moment its mistress returned.

But days went by—aye, and weeks—and she did not appear! The drawing-rooms were never occupied, the landau was never taken out, the ponies and hack were still standing there eating their heads off.

The place and establishment were, however, still kept up—kept up at the utmost pitch of perfection, as if at any hour of the day the absent mistress of the house might be expected to return, but still still she never came—never was heard of, and now, not merely days and weeks, but months had gone by, and still "she cometh not" might have been the burden of Gilbert Vernon's song.

It had gradually leaked out that she had gone away under a kind of cloud more than two years previously, that this cloud had been subsequently entirely cleared away, and that the sun of complete innocence had shone out since, but that, somehow, Mrs. Vernon's pride would not suffer her to return; "no, not even for the children's sake," said one gossiping matron to another, nodding her head and lifting her hands and eyebrows.

"I wonder what will be the end of it?" said all the neighbours. "I wonder what was the real reason of the row between the Vernons, whom everyone thought such a happy couple!—quite models to the whole county. But one never sees what is behind the scenes, of course."

"I always thought Mr. Vernon was too polite to his wife," said one lady with cool decision.

"Depend upon it, a man who carries his wife's shawls and parasols, and hands her out of a carriage, and opens the door for her, and all that sort of thing, just as if she were not married to him at all, puts it on to disarm suspicion. I always understood Gilbert Vernon had a hatred to matrimony. This young woman caught him; and, believe me, he beat her behind the scenes, and she ran away and won't come back."

"I don't think Mrs. Vernon ever gave me the look of an ill-used wife," said another lady, "much less ever showed the marks of blows and bruises. I like Gilbert Vernon! he is a gentleman to his finger ends. Believe that it is she who has shown him the cloven foot. I never have any faith in these unequal marriages; they come to grief—the people I mean—sooner or later."

"But if she is in fault," said number three, "why should he be so anxious to have her back? Why has the house been all newly done up—new carriages, new horses, new liveries? That does not look as if your theory would hold water, Mrs. Sharp," turning to the last speaker.

"Oh, my dear, you are not as well up in the ways of the world as I am," said the other with a sniff. "Don't you know that she has come in for a large fortune!" spreading out both hands with gusto as she spoke. "It's that, and he's quite ready to take her back and wink at all her

little errors; and then, you see, the children, as they are boys it's no matter so much what their mother has been or has done. If they were girls it would be quite another thing. You can see that."

This last lady spoke with such an air of confidence and supreme assertion that she silenced any other arguments—hers was considered to be amply conclusive. Mrs. Vernon had been under a cloud, and was to be forgiven and reinstated on account of her fortune.

These ladies all had made very bad shots, as we know; but Mr. Vernon and the queer state of affairs up at the Manor had been a perfect wind-fall to them in the way of gossip all through a very wet winter and a cold, bleak spring.

These were the little nobodies who lived in white villas on the borders of Maxton, and were, in one respect, like Mahomet's coffin—between earth and heaven—being half way between the townsfolk on one hand, upon whom they looked down with great scorn, and "the county" on the other, whom they looked up to and worshipped at a respectful distance.

As months went on Gilbert became more hopeless. He now regretted that he had been in such a hurry to return and set up house at the Manor, and had so foolishly jumped at the conclusion that Georgie would be easily discovered and would gladly return.

"What a fool," he said to himself, "he had been and must look in the eyes of his friends, having made such preparations, and being so full of expectation for a person who had never come, and probably never meant to come."

He had given up seeking her at last as a bad job; he had spent hundreds of pounds in vain; searches had been made in quest, through his agents, of at least half a dozen ladies, who had turned to be complete strangers.

There was no use in carrying on such a fruitless search. If she chose to come home she knew where it was, and of her whereabouts he was as ignorant as ever.

One person in the household knew the absent lady's address, and that was the boys' nurse, Mrs. Lumaden; but she was under a most solemn promise never to reveal it save by her mistress's express permission.

She had corresponded with her constantly, posting the letters always with her own hands, under cover to Mrs. Vernon's bankers.

She kept her posted up in all news about the boys at regular intervals. She even ventured to add little extra items about the master—that he had everything prepared for her, and great search made for her, and was always talking to the boys about her soon coming back.

At one time Mrs. Lumaden threw this out as a broad hint, but it had no effect. Then she ventured to add that, "Mr. Vernon was in very low spirits, and seemed greatly disheartened and lonely."

Mrs. Lumaden had known of the break-up, and of the whole story from first to last, about Mrs. Vernon's first marriage. Her sympathies had been entirely with her mistress.

She was devoted to her and the boys, especially Master Alick, whom she had what is called "taken from the month," and whom she looked upon as her own special property.

All through that dreadful year in London her heart had been entirely with the so-called Mrs. George, and she had felt—she could not have exactly explained why—rather angry with Mr. Vernon, and had been short and sharp in her answers when he ventured into the nursery at Lady Fanny's.

Now it was the other way. She was angry with her mistress and sorry for him.

It was wretched to see a young man like him living all alone in utter solitude in that great big house, breakfasting alone, dining alone, going out alone.

No, she had no patience with Mrs. Vernon at all. She knew she was wanted at home, and that if she came she would be only too welcome. She was obstinate—she had got some queer notions in her head—she had no notion of coming back.

Mrs. Lumaden had written as strongly as she dared, and the answer she had received was,



to say the least of it, sharp, short, and decisive, "She was not to write in that tone again, although she was a very worthy, excellent, faithful woman."

Mrs. Lumaden put the letter in the fire, as she did all that came from her mistress, and made up her mind that she would not meddle again; it was ill and thankless work interfering between man and wife, but she was main sorry for her master for all that.

She saw him one day as she was passing through the hall standing in the drawing room with Jack, who was clamouring to be taken for a drive.

After some discussion about his lessons, it was settled that he might go, and he instantly rushed madly for his hat, cannoning against the solid Mrs. Lumaden in the doorway, and clattering away across the oaken hall.

"He is growing more like her every day!" ventured Mrs. Lumaden, nodding her head at a small oil painting of Mrs. Vernon that stood between the two windows on an easel.

"Yes," assented her listener, glancing at the same picture, wistfully. "I am beginning to think, Mrs. Lumaden—mind you, I would not say this to anyone but you—that that we will never see her again! She may be dead!" in a lower voice.

"Oh! no, sir!" very eagerly, "she's not that!"

"What!" looking at her sharply. "Ah! I see, Mrs. Lumaden! you know—you know where she is! You speak with confidence! Tell me where she is—I implore you!"

"What did I say, sir!" getting red with alarm. "What did I say! Only that she was not dead!"

"It was the way you spoke—the manner, not the matter! I believe that she writes to you. Now, Mrs. Lumaden, for Heaven's sake tell me the truth! Your face will speak for you if your tongue won't. Pity me! I know you will!"

"Truth! Good heart alive, what have I ever said!" greatly distressed and twisting her apron into every shape, looking dreadfully put out and nervous.

"Is she well?" he continued; "surely you may tell me that much—only that much!" very earnestly.

"Oh! Mr. Vernon, you are a gentleman," tearfully, "you would not go for to make a poor woman like me break her bounden word, now would you? I've given my promise to her—my sacred solemn promise, and you just took me unawares just now. Oh, sir," beginning to cry in earnest—"oh, sir, you would not press me would you?"

"I don't ask you to break your promise, you may rely on that; but you break none, surely, if you tell me is she well—no harm in that surely!"

"She is well; I may say that."

"I suppose you have been in her confidence all along," rather bitterly, "you have the advantage of me."

"Well, sir," wiping her eyes, "I've been in what you may call her confidence, and write and tell her how the boys is regular—and, maybe, it's your own fault for not knowing as much as I do. There's been such a lot of mistakes about that Blaine, and all, and, poor young lady, her heart was nearly broken between you, it really were!"

"Between us!" indignantly. "Now, Mrs. Lumaden, had I anything to say to that! Come now, be just."

"No, no; and no wonder you are vexed with her now—I am a bit myself. I can't make it out. And she did seem, if I may say it without offence, main fond of you once, and it seems hard as I should know what you don't, but it's her orders—and then," with a sudden gush of professional pride, "you see as I was Master Alick's nurse—nurse to her first—I took him from the month, you'll remember."

"Yes—I remember, too, how he roared night and day; you had no sinecure. But I suppose she says nothing of me, Mrs. Lumaden, nor of coming home?" gazing at her intently.

"Not a word."

"And—and does she seem happy?"

"Oh! yes, she writes cheerful. And now, really, Mr. Vernon—now you won't ask me no more, will you?" beseechingly.

"No—no more. I am sorry, now, we all came home," walking to the window and looking out; "but it can't be helped. I'll have these rooms shut up; these are not likely to be wanted," coming back towards Mrs. Lumaden as he spoke.

"Maybe they will before long," she said, consolingly; "maybe she'll change her mind yet, and work out of this queer notion; maybe—"

"Father! father!" cried two small figures, in pilot cloth top-coats, like miniature men; "are you coming! What a time you have been. We've been out in the dog-cart waiting for you—do come!"

And, thus dragged on either side by his impatient and imperious sons, he left Mrs. Lumaden the drawing-room to herself.

## CHAPTER XL

To divulge the secret of Georgie's very secure retreat we must go back to the very day, the very hour, when she was left by Maggie, key in hand, to be her own portress to freedom.

She had waited until the house was silent, and was about to creep downstairs when a sudden noise caused her to start back with beating heart—timid as a fawn.

The Blaines were evidently quarrelling, having quite a scene below, something similar to the one she had witnessed the previous evening, only on a more extensive scale; high, shrill talking, rising to screams; low mutters of a man's voice; more screams; then a sudden loud rumbling and rolling of furniture; then dead silence.

She stole like a mouse to the top of the landing, and looked over. In a moment a door downstairs was flung open, and dashed back.

She had a hasty view of Mary Todd, with sweeping robes, gathered in one hand, dishevelled hair, a wild, red face, put out the lobby gas, and then ascending with strange, uneven steps to her room—the one just below Georgie's.

Georgie waited and waited, sitting on the top of the stairs, trying to screw up her courage, and listening eagerly for his footstep.

Once he had gone up, she might descend with impunity; but what ages he was in coming! and the precious moments were flying away so fast!

At last, spurred to desperation, she took her bundle in her hand, and, with knees, actually knocking together, fearing that any moment he might come forth and seize her, she stole downstairs, down past the smoking-room door, with panting heart and bated breath—down, down, all the way down in the dark, to the hall.

She opened the door, having put back the bolts with a trembling hand, and she stood outside once more in the open air—free!

She closed the door as softly as she could, and then began to run.

But she did not keep up that pace long. She was soon out of breath.

It was a misty, drizzling night, the streets were wet, and her feet soon soaking.

Every policeman she saw made her heart bound, every skulking figure made her shake like a leaf.

Here she dived under an alley to avoid one; there she crept under an archway to avoid another; now she sat down in a porch, and rested.

It was four o'clock in the grey morning when she arrived at a great big central station, and went in and sat upon one of the wooden seats, completely worn out.

Who would think, to look at it now, that it was such a very bustling, busy place in the day-time!

There was not a soul to be seen. It was bitterly cold. The waiting-rooms, of course, were shut up. The first morning train did not start till half-past seven.

There for three morbid hours she sat, half-frozen, watching the gradual waking up of the

station, from the refreshment-room cat, who was the first arrival from a long night's marauding and serenading on neighbouring roofs, to the clerk of the ticket-office, who appeared last upon the scene.

Fires were lit, porters began to bustle, engines in remote sheds to get up steam. The sooner there was a train ready to leave the better for her. Where its destination might be was of no consequence as long as it was at least a hundred miles from London.

Not a few glances had been cast on the pretty, pale young woman, sitting with a bundle on her lap and a pair of thin French shoes upon her feet, at the most remote corner of a bench, looking ill, and frozen, and frightened—looking really very strange.

One of the porters, taking pity on her forlorn-looking condition, advanced with a roll of his body, and said,—

"Got any luggage, miss?"

For all reply she clutched her bundle convulsively, and shook her head.

He was evidently at a loss to classify her, and he took off his cap and scratched his head as he stared at her common old shawl, her bundle, and yet her face was not that of a young woman of his own rank in life. Who was she?

"I beg pardon; but you do look mighty cold and down. There's good hot coffee going now at the refreshment-bar. Suppose you have a cup? It will warm you a bit."

She jumped at the idea, after her wet cold night and morning spent in streets and station, and got up stiffly, and walked slowly after him in the direction of the bar.

He was very much astonished, indeed, to receive half-a-crown for his civility, and all that Georgie gained by such generosity was a certain amount of pity as being "a poor half-witted creature who did not know one coin from another, and was not safe to be going about alone."

The station was filling fast, and the hurry and commotion increasing every moment, for the half-past seven express was just about to start for Birmingham.

"Where is that train going to?" inquired Georgie of her friend the porter, pointing towards it with a bare hand.

"To Birmingham, miss. It's the morning express."

"Oh, to Birmingham! It will do as well as any other place," she said, half to herself.

But the porter heard her, and his first suspicions were naturally confirmed.

"Please get me a ticket, single, second-class," handing him a five-pound note.

She was certainly not fit to be trusted with money. She had no purse, but carried all her wealth in the corner of her pocket-handkerchief. She was soon afterwards seated in the corner of a carriage, the only occupant, save one, a lady, who had got in briskly at almost the very last moment—a lady in plain black, with a very close bonnet and thick veil, dressed in the style of an Anglican sister.

After a time she raised this veil, and began to look about her and to settle some small parcels, and in doing so her eyes fell on Georgie, who was gazing out of the window in a dazed, stupid sort of way.

She looked again, much harder this time, and with an expression of incredulous horror. Then, moving up quite opposite to her, she bent over, and said, in a singularly sweet, clear voice,—

"It is not possible that I am speaking to Mrs. Vernon—to Georgie Vernon, of Alton Manor?"

Georgie stared at her vacantly; then, recognising a face familiar in happier days, that seemed so long ago that they belonged to another life, she only replied by bursting into tears.

(To be continued.)

THE Chinese, very, very long ago, hatched out their ducks by artificial heat; and the incubators that seem so wonderful to us at the poultry shows and country fairs were an old story in the East long before our great grandfathers were born.





## SOCIETY.

DURING the first week in January the Prince of Wales will probably shoot at Castle Rising with the Duke of Fife.

THE Duchess of Albany will go to Cannes soon, where she will make a long stay at the villa where the late Duke died, and which is now her Royal Highness's own property.

PRINCE ADOLPHUS of Teck and his bride will be paying a series of visits at Sandringham, the White Lodge, Eaton and Trentham, before settling at Roundhay, near Leeds, where they are to arrive on January 31st.

LI HUNG CHANG, the greatest of Chinese statesmen is seventy-one years old. He has been previously disgraced. In 1870 he was despoiled of his honours, but afterwards regained Imperial favour.

THE late Lady Caroline Courtenay was the last survivor but one of the eight Maids-of-Honour appointed on the accession of the Queen, in 1837. Nearly all these ladies have lived to advanced ages, only one of them having died before the year 1875.

THE Queen quite approved of having no festivities in connection with the Russian Royal marriage; but rejoicings on an immense scale are to be made on the day of their Majesties' coronation, which will be some time next summer, and St. Petersburg will then be *en fete* for a week.

THE Queen has gone to Osborne for a stay of nine weeks, after which her Majesty will return to Windsor Castle until the first week in April, when she is going abroad. The Queen intends to pay two visits to Buckingham Palace in March, and on each occasion her Majesty will stop in town for two nights.

KAISER WILHELM carries with him a small but serviceable revolver, either in his pocket or in his belt, when he is in uniform. His Majesty is extremely skilful in the use of the weapon, which is inspected every morning, to make sure that it is in working order.

THROUGHOUT the terrible fortnight of magnificent gloom preceding the Russian bridal ceremony the bride-elect in accordance with the wish of the widowed Empress and of the Emperor himself was always dressed in pure white. The Queen was very pleased with the idea, as her Majesty felt that black was too sombre and foreboding an attire for a young bride-elect.

THE Princess Alix of Hesse devoted more than an hour on her wedding-morning to answering by telegram the congratulations of the friends of her girlhood. A telegram of five lines, signed "Your old pupil Alix," was sent to Madame Merceman, of Brussels, who was her French governess for three years, and to whom the Empress of Russia is warmly attached.

IT is rumoured that in view of the maturing boyhood of the little King of Spain, the Queen Regent has decided to put off the sombre melancholy, which up to now, has distinguished the Court of Spain, and little by little to light up the candles and set the fiddles going. It is said that a leading Court physician has told the Queen Regent that much amusement, brightness of surroundings, and gaiety in the *entourage* were requisite for his Majesty, and that he must, owing to his very delicate and sensitive constitution, be surrounded by all that is most likely to make him take a joyous view of life.

GREAT preparations are already being made for the Czar's coronation, and the throne, which is considered sacred and inviolable, has left St. Petersburg. It is of chased silver, and, besides its intrinsic worth, is also of great value as an object of antiquity. On the coronation day the new Czar sits upon this wonderful throne, with the Imperial sword at his side, the crown on his head, and the sceptre in his right hand. The clergy, the high dignitaries, the nobles, and the generals kneel down; the Patriarch anoints him with holy oil, consecrating him, and he—the new master of 120,000,000 subjects—taking the crown off his own head, places it on that of his wife.

## STATISTICS.

THE number of telegraphic messages sent in the United Kingdom exceed 60,000,000 per year.

THE average age of the policeman is 35½ years; average service, 9½ years; average height, 5 ft. 10½ in.

THE average age at which women marry in civilized countries is said to be twenty-three and one-half years.

THE heart ordinarily beats about seventy times a minute, and throws about two ounces of blood at each contraction.

OVER seventy millions of sewing needles are made weekly in the town of Redditch, where the most extensive needle manufactories in the world are situated.

## GEMS.

EACH succeeding day is the scholar of that which went before it.

A TRITE Jewish proverb says that he who teaches not his son a trade, teaches him to be a thief.

IT is only the great-hearted who can be true friends; the mean and cowardly can never know what true friendship means.

A KIND heart is a better vindication of one's belief than any argument. Deeds go further than words in justifying one's creed.

LET each day take thought for what concerns it, liquidate its own affairs, and respect the day which is to follow, and then we shall be always ready. To know how to be ready is at the bottom to know how to die.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

**COCONUT COOKIES.**—One cup of butter, two cups of sugar, two eggs, one cup of grated coconut, two teaspoonfuls of baking powder, flour enough to roll. Roll very thin and bake quickly, but do not brown.

**GINGER DROPS.**—One half-cup of shortening, two teaspoonfuls of baking powder, one teaspoon of brown sugar, half a cup of molasses, two eggs, one teaspoonful of ginger. Flour enough to make a batter so that it will drop from the spoon in drops as large as an egg.

**BAKED EGGS.**—Butter a gratin dish or pieplate, and break the required number of eggs into it. Put the plate in a moderate oven, and cook until the white is set. It will take from five to eight minutes to bake the eggs. Special dishes are made for this purpose.

**CREAMED DRIED BEEF.**—One tablespoonful of butter browned in a frying-pan. Put in about half a pound of chipped beef and let it get thoroughly hot. Pour in about one cup of milk and thicken with a little flour and water. Scrambled eggs put around the beef are a nice addition to it.

**WHIPPED CREAM PIE.**—Sweeten with white sugar one teaspoon of thick cream, made as cold as possible without freezing, and flavour with lemon to taste. Beat until as light as eggs for frosting and keep cool until the crust is ready. Make crust moderately rich, prick well with a fork to prevent blistering, bake, and spread on the cream and for a finish add bits of jelly over the top. The above will make two pies.

**SALTED ALMONDS.**—Shell and dry half a pound of almonds. Lay them in a clean tin pan with a couple of teaspoonfuls of butter and put them in a rather hot oven. Shake the pan frequently that the almonds may colour equally. When of a uniform light brown take them out, drain them in a colander on brown paper and sprinkle them lightly with salt.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

PARCHMENT has been in use since the earliest times.

CHEAP woollen stockings are adulterated by the addition of the fibre of wood pulp.

THE lowest graduate in honours at Cambridge is called the "Wooden Spoon."

ITALY has more theatres, in proportion to population, than any other country.

THE first painter in Rome was brought from Etruria by Quintus Fabius about B.C. 291.

THE first printed and illustrated work on natural history was by Schoeffer, 1484.

IN Greece art was essentially religious; the Romans adapted it to household decoration.

STOCKINGS were first worn in Italy, in the year 1100. Before that period it was customary to swathe the feet and legs in bandages.

A MACHINE has just been completed that will count and bind in packages 500,000 postal cards in ten hours.

SIGNALS used by ships at sea date from 1665. They were invented by the Duke of York, afterwards James II.

THE English income-tax has been changed eighteen times since 1842, varying from 2d. in the pound to 1s. 4d.

A LITTLE machine that makes forty-two cigarettes in a minute has been invented by a Frenchman. It is run by steam.

THE brain of an idiot contains much less phosphorus than that of a person of average mental power.

IT was customary, a hundred years ago, when a gentleman bowed to a lady, to scrape his foot upon the ground.

FRENCH women in the rural districts wash their faces in butter, and rarely use soap and water. This renders the skin beautifully soft and elastic.

SCIENTISTS insist that the only sure protection against lightning is to encase the whole building in a metal covering. An open metal netting would be best.

THE best burglar-proof safes are made of alternate layers of hard and soft metal, which are welded together. This combination will not yield to either drill or sledge-hammer.

IN Bulgaria the proprietor of a medicine who announces it as certain to cure a specified disease is liable to be imprisoned if the drug fails to accomplish what he promises.

IT is a belief of oyster-catchers that the oyster is peculiarly sensitive to sudden jars. The careful oysterman never chops wood on deck when he has a cargo on board, lest he kill the oysters, and he dreads a thunderstorm for the same reason.

ARAB girls, before they enter the harem and take the veil are a curious sight to behold. Their bodies and faces are dyed a bright yellow with tumeric; on this ground they paint black lines with antimony over their eyes; the fashionable colour for the nose is red; green spots adorn the cheeks, and the general aspect is grotesque beyond description.

THE Russians have absorbing and pleasing musical entertainment. The only instruments are horns, and each produces but one tone. The horns vary like the pipes of an organ. One of them sounds only every C, while another only every D, and so throughout the tune. Each player is so correctly trained that whenever his instrument must speak, it is given with the greatest accuracy, and the tones of the different instruments sound as if from a single one. The players, usually serfs, receive very careful training, and the works of Haydn, Mozart and other distinguished composers are executed with taste and skill. This pleasing style of band entertainment was invented by Nariachkin. Since his time there has been great improvement in the construction and capabilities of the instrument and skillfulness of treatment. Nearly a hundred and fifty years ago, at a grand festival in Moscow, hunting-horn rehearsals met with great applause by enthusiastic music lovers.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**OSBERT.**—It is legal and blinding.

**S. S.**—We are not familiar with process.

**CUMMOS.**—Elephants frequently live 120 years.

**BRNIE.**—There are thirty varieties of bamboo.

**M. O. G.**—Salt is an excellent aid to digestion.

**POTTY.**—Steep the soles in linseed oil for some hours.

**OLD SUBSCRIBER.**—We cannot say; it is purely a private matter.

**ANDREW.**—You had better submit your indentures to a solicitor.

**L. C.**—It cannot be done; the only effectual remedy is an indiarubber sole.

**REG.**—Reginald is a common English Christian name, but of French extraction.

**CONSTANT READER.**—The mark was the monogram used by the Christian Emperor Constantine.

**IN DESPAIR.**—We cannot suggest any more effectual means of banishing the pests.

**YUM-YUM.**—The earrings referred to can be obtained at any first-class jewellery store.

**BACKED-HEARTED.**—When a courtship is finally broken off all presents should be mutually returned.

**ALICIA.**—Numbers of people have found a good rubbing in of paraffin oil an excellent remedy for both.

**BOBBY.**—The Prince of Wales cannot ascend the throne until after the death of her Majesty.

**X. Y.**—If the razor falls nothing will succeed; persevere with it for a month or so.

**LOLA.**—A piece of camphor placed in the boxes in which silver is kept will keep it from tarnishing.

**IN TROUBLE.**—Application on her behalf should be made to the parochial inspector without delay.

**J. B.**—The name "Imogen" is pronounced Im-je-n, with the accent on the first syllable.

**HOWARD.**—Wash the feet in warm water containing a few drops of carbolic acid, or some vinegar with carbolic soap.

**RHOOL.**—A little milk carefully rubbed over, and rubbed off slightly with the same cloth, is the best thing you can use.

**R. P. B.**—Before 1873 all books were sewed by hand. The introduction of machinery has reduced the cost about one-half.

**NEWLY WID.**—A thin straw matting might answer, but if you have not got the oil cloth we should recommend coconut matting as preferable.

**UMA.**—To prevent lamp chimneys from cracking put them into a little of cold water, gradually heat it till it boils, and then let it gradually cool.

**ARMOR.**—The best and safest way to clean down smoky paper is to take thick slices of stale (two or three days' old) loaf, and rub with that.

**OLD READER.**—If the glass is so badly defaced as to be useless, probably the only alternative is to send it to a manufacturer and have it resilvered.

**ANONS.**—Send penny stamp to Government Emigrants' Office, 81, Broadway, E.W., for New Zealand Handbook. That is official, and gives all the details you require.

**WORKING MAN'S WIFE.**—Some people try boiling a quantity of potato skins in it, others prefer quarter of a pound of Spanish whiting; either way some of the lime or "fur" is loosened.

**A. L.**—Horsehoes are sometimes suspended over doors, with the points down, but often with the points up to prevent the supposed luck attached to them from running out.

**VERY DOUBTFUL.**—We do not think such a union would be productive of lasting felicity. The disparity in age and the nearness of the relationship militate against the idea.

**INQUISITIVE.**—Bath chairs derived their name from having been first used in Bath to carry belles and beaux to and from the Terpelechoran festivities; Bath buns, we think, also owe their origin to the town.

**F. S.**—If they are of a kind that can be taken apart and are merely of plain sheets, placing them for a moment in hot water, then allowing them to cool under a weight, may restore them.

**A. S. B.**—It is quite legal for a depositor in the Post Office Savings Bank to uplift his money and deposit it in a private savings bank; as long as he does not pay money into both he is acting quite within his right.

**L. WARD.**—You are not bound to support your illegitimate daughter after the age of sixteen. This answers all your questions; no further liability attaches to you after she has reached this age.

**MAGIE O'REILLY.**—1. We gave the author of this quotation a few weeks ago. 2. In such cases we do not consider it policy to take spirits of any kind, although some would recommend a moderate quantity as doing no harm. 3. Your writing is very neat.

**B. J.**—Get some Spanish brown, or burnt sienna, at a colourman's; melt it in water (cold or hot), and when thoroughly dissolved give the floor once or two coats; when the stain is deep enough to suit your taste, give the whole one or two coats of copal varnish.

**J. F.**—The best recipe to use for their removal is to put powdered pipeclay upon the part; then lay a hot iron on the clay, which will absorb the grease; any dirt left may either be taken off with rubber or with a brush dipped in spirits of wine, this does not affect the ink.

**A HAPPY PAIR.**—As the parents are opposed to the match, it would be advisable to attempt to remove their scruples before proceeding any further in the affair. The opposition of parents to an intended marriage should always be treated with consideration and respect.

**LOLA.**—Washing with carbolic or tar soap will tend to harden the skin, but may also slightly roughen it; using water in which oatmeal has been mixed without soap of any kind is probably the best way to wash a very tender face; avoid cosmetics, or you may induce some disease that may disfigure you permanently.

**E. L.**—A family pew is private property, and should that family not choose to attend the church when a certain clergyman officiates, it is not lawful for him to allow the pew to be occupied by strangers; but the etiquette is never to refuse a seat in a place of worship. Etiquette and law often differ.

**J. J. S.**—At the battle of Waterloo the number actually engaged in the fight was: French, 73,000; while that of the allied army under Wellington was about 70,000, although both armies were larger, part of each being sent to prevent the approach of succour to either side.

**BOBBIE.**—Of course, much depends on the society. As a rule, people are not required to make speeches under such circumstances. If you choose, you might thank your friends for the compliment of admitting you to their fraternity, and express the hope that the relations will always continue agreeable.

## SOWING GOOD SEED.

THOUGH Time, relentless, dim the eye,  
And brow and cheek his imprint show,  
Naught can, while memory lives, blot out  
The vista of the long ago.

HAPPY the old man's retrospect  
Of early days—ah! blest indeed  
If he, with truth upon his lips,  
Can say: "When young I sowed good seed."

For from the good seed sown in youth  
In later years a harvest springs  
Of man's respect and peace of soul  
That an approving conscience brings.

These echoes age:—"O' on should life's ill  
With its decline keep equal pace,  
Remembrance of a well-spent past  
Not all its sorrows can efface."

But he who early sows ill seed,  
And sows no better in his prime,  
In recollection finds no joy  
When bowed beneath the hand of Time.

Memory to him proves but a sting,  
And fills his bosom with unrest;  
Fears of the future wring his soul,  
—And thoughts remorseful rack his breast.

Sow, then, the seed you know is good,  
Kind Heaven will fertilize the field,  
And when the harvest time shall come,  
Will bless you with a bounteous yield.

W. R. B.

**PUZZLED.**—The origin of the saying "There is not room enough to swing a cat" is traced to a superstition current in Transylvania. In that country it is said if a cat runs away, when recovered she must be swung three times around to attach her to the dwelling. The same is done with a stolen cat by a thief if he would retain it.

**F. G.**—The griffin is a species of creature found in the mountainous parts of Europe, North Africa and Turkey. In heathen mythology the griffin is an animal with the body of a lion and head and wings of an eagle. Of course no such creature ever existed any more than the famous minotaur, centaur, or the winged dragon.

**B. N. M.**—"Strawberry" a well-known and cultivated fruit, the Anglo-Saxon name of which "Strawberige," or "Strowberie," was probably derived from the straw-like stems of the plant, or from the berries lying strewn on the ground. The several species belong to the genus *Fragaria* (from the Latin name *frago*) of the rose family.

**INJURED BELLY.**—At entertainments gentlemen should avoid getting into groups to the neglect of the ladies. This is sometimes done by those who "know the right and yet the wrong persons," while others, it would seem, know no better. Ladies not infrequently complain of the misconduct of their attendants in this particular, and their protest against it should be heeded.

**CONSTANCE.**—Young ladies should not encourage the attentions of their admirers, if they think they intend to propose to them, unless they are inclined to reciprocate their admiration. No woman with a proper degree of self-respect will affect to be deeply interested in a wooer when she really intends to reject him. If she have the ordinary tact with which her sex is credited, she can readily give him to understand that while she has respect or regard for him as a friend, she cannot entertain any thought of him as a nearer relation.

**FARREY.**—The Drury Lane Theatre years ago had its ceiling painted to represent a blue sky with clouds, among which were depicted flying in every direction. This ceiling extended over the gallery, and, consequently, the occupants of these higher seats were said to be "among the gods," while later, the term "gallery gods" was applied to those occupying the highest tiers in theatres.

**TRIOUBED HARRY.**—A man who is not man enough to support himself, but prefers to lean upon his mother will never make a satisfactory husband, we think you are only courting trouble if you tie yourself to him, and the best answer you can give him is to say that if he shows by getting into a self-supporting business a year or eighteen months hence that he is able to find the means to make a comfortable home you will not object then to fill it.

**INNOCE.**—A little concession on the part of one traveller to another should be oftener practiced than it is, we admit, but remembering the various people of both sexes whom we encounter in our journey through life, that selfishness will crop out here and there; that amiable tempers are not possessed by every one; and that no one is perfect, we must come to the conclusion that the travelling public is about as free from faults as human nature admits of.

**FAVORABLE.**—The lines are as follows:  
"The child that is born on the Sabbath day,  
Is blithe and bonny, good and gay;  
Monday's child is fair of face;  
Tuesday's child is full of grace;  
Wednesday's child is merry and glad,  
Thursday's child is full of woe;  
Friday's child is loving and giving,  
Saturday's child must work for his living."

**POLLY.**—To a gallon of soft soap add an equal quantity of water and let it boil. If the soap is very thick it may be necessary to use two gallons of water. Wet the linen in this, putting it in when dry; and take it out as wet as possible. Then put it out in the open sunlight, and sprinkle table salt thickly over it. Keep watch of it, and as it becomes dry sprinkle with a very fine watering pot or clothes' sprinkler, so as to keep it wet, but do not put on enough water to wash off the soap and salt. Let it remain out day and night, and the raddier will gradually disappear.

**C. G. M.**—Dissolve a few grains of sulphate of manganese in sufficient water to take it up; mop over the surface of the case with it, and hold it over the flame of a spirit lamp close enough to scorch it. By care, the whole surface may be brought to a uniform rich brown, or attractively variegated by heating some parts more than others, and thus varying the colour, which will appear dull at first; but, on oiling the case with raw linseed oil, and rubbing it with a smooth piece of hard wood, the colour will be finely developed. Give the case no other finish, unless it be another oiling some days after the first.

**ONE IN DISTRESS.**—The nervousness of which you complain is not confined to any age or condition. The young, the middle-aged, and the old suffer alike from it. How to overcome or cure it often baffles the skill of the best physicians. Certain habits sometimes form effective, but more attention to our daily habits than is usually bestowed upon them is more apt to bring about an improvement than anything else. Early rising and early bedtime, cheerful company and varied amusements, avoidance of over-eating and indulgence in any sort of dissipation, and daily use of the bath-tub, all will help to mitigate if not conquer the serious trouble in question.

**MADEIRA.**—Veal chops breaded, with tomato sauce, should be prepared and cooked in the following manner: Select fine firm veal, and have the chops cut from the ribs and the meat trimmed neatly from the end of the bone, leaving about two inches to decorate with fringed paper; dip each chop into beaten egg, and then into fine bread crumbs, and set them in a very cold place for an hour; then dip them again in the beaten egg and again roll them in bread crumbs and sprinkle well with salt and pepper. Put some nice clarified beef fat in a frying pan and stand it on the range. When it gets smoking hot fry the chops carefully in it until they are a delicate brown; then lift them out and lay them on a hot platter, with the bone ends all toward the edge of the dish; slip a fringed ring of tissue paper over the edge of each rib. Pour the tomato sauce on the platter with the chops, being careful not to get any of it on the paper decorations.

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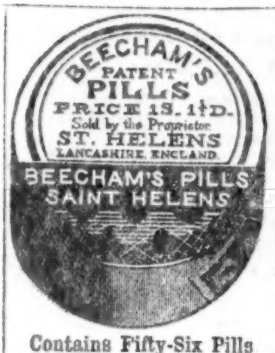
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LEVER BROS., Ltd., Port Sunlight, nr. Birkenhead, have received the accompanying Report on Lifebuoy Royal Disinfectant Soap from Dr. Karl Enoch, Chem. Hygien. Inst., Hamburg.

## REPORT.

The examination of the sample of 'Lifebuoy Royal Disinfectant Soap' furnished to me by Messrs. Lever Brothers, Limited, of Port Sunlight, England, gives the following results as to its action as a disinfectant.

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3.—The Diphtheria Microbes were killed after a hour with the 5 per cent. solution.

4.—The 5 per cent. solution was tried on fresh Carbuncle germs, and the result showed that the Microbe life was entirely extinct after 4 hours.

From the foregoing experiments it will be seen that the Lifebuoy Royal Disinfectant Soap is a powerful disinfectant and exterminator of the various germs and microbes of disease.

(Signed) KARL ENOCH, Chem., Hygien. Inst., Hamburg.

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